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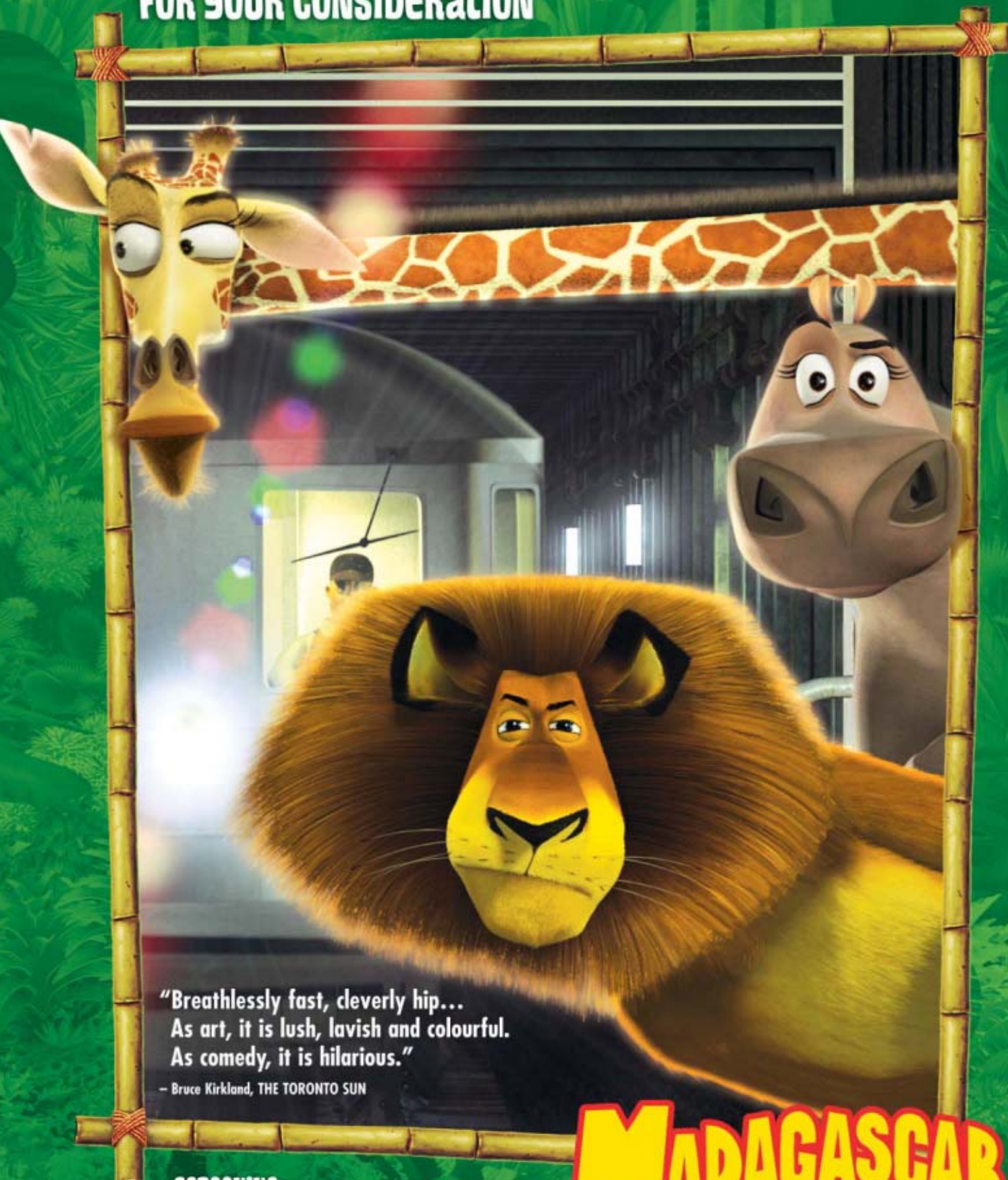
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ANIMATION MAGAZINE

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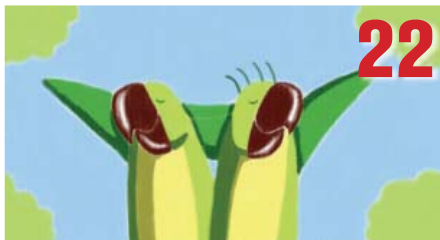
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On the Cover: Kanbar Entertainment's CG-animated feature, *Hoodwinked!*, is a welcome addition to the list of this year's Oscar contenders.





They say the holiday season is the toughest time of the year to lose a loved one. Like many in the animation community, we were deeply saddened by news of the passing of our colleague, indie animator, teacher and journalist, **Wendy Jackson Hall**. She passed away at age 32 after developing blood clots in her lungs.

Those of us who were lucky enough to know Wendy will always cherish the memory of this bright, spirited and energetic young woman who had a never-ending passion for animation and a natural skill for passing on her knowledge to her young students. A knowledgeable contributor to *Animation Magazine*, *AWN*, *The Hollywood Reporter*, *Variety* and *Wired Magazine*, Wendy was also an active member of ASIFA-Hollywood and helped organize events such as the World Animation Celebration and the Annie Awards during her years in Los Angeles. In 2001, she moved to Bainbridge Island, Washington, after her marriage to Porter Hall. She continued to teach, write and do consulting work for AtomFilms and Nicktoons. Wendy also shared her love of animation with the children in the region through her Animated Adventures business and Puppets on Parade workshops.

If you'd like to share your memories of Wendy, you can email her husband, porter@jacksonhall.com. You can also look back at some wonderful pictures of Wendy on her website, www.animatedadventures.com. These glowing images are testament to the kind of sunshine she brought to other people's lives. You just know she's organizing some amazing animated project in a better place right now.



Ramin

Ramin Zahed
Editor-in-Chief
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It's Your Christmas Special's 40th Anniversary, Charlie Brown!

Please believe us when we tell you that it has been 40 years since **A Charlie Brown Christmas**, one of the all-time greatest holiday specials, first aired on CBS. Based on the classic *Peanuts* strip by Charles M. Schulz, the Lee Mendelson/Bill Melendez toon hasn't lost any of its original magic or powerful message against the commercialization of the holiday season.

We thought it would be fun to see how the passage of time would affect the appearance of our beloved gang, so we asked for some help from our readers.

The winners of our year-end contest were **Chris Northrop** and **Koy Campbell** who came up with the illustration you see here. A big thanks to all of you creative types who participated in our homage to this timeless classic. Don't forget to catch the special when it airs again on ABC this December.



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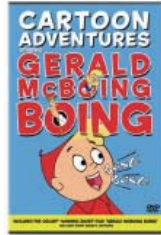
The Animation Planner January

1: If you live in France or Belgium, you can catch the wonderful new animated feature by Bénédicte Galup and Michel Ocelot, *Kirikou and the Savage Beasts* (also known as *The Child Kirikou*), in theaters. Can an American distributor pick up this film this year, s'il-vous-plait?

2: Feel like some animated reads? How about diving into Kathy Merlock Jackson's *Walt Disney: Conversations* in bookstores this week?



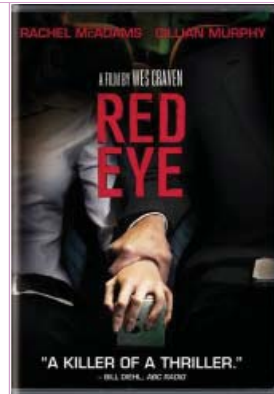
3: Classic UPA fans will get a kick out of the new DVD release, *Cartoon Adventures Starring Gerald McBoing Boing*, out in stores today. Also out today is *Walt Disney's Timeless Tales, Volume 3*, featuring gems such as *Casey at the Bat*, *Little Hiawatha* and *The Wise Little Hen* (which marks the first toon appearance of Donald Duck).



6: In full release this week is something for hardcore horror fans, *BloodRayne*, a throwback yarn about a half-vampire, half-human creature in 18th century Romania!



7: It's time to get those short attention spans to the **4th Annual Flickering Image Festival - Shorts Competition** in Los Angeles (www.actorsbone.com/shorts).



10: You can grab Paramount's *Dora the Explorer: Save the Day!* DVD for your favorite preschooler in stores today. Action fans may want to spend their cash on *The Transporter 2* and *Red Eye* DVDs.



13-17: Get your flu shots and jump on that jet plane to catch the annual **Taiwan International Children's TV and Film Festival** today! (www.pts.org.tw/~web01/kids_films/e_b.htm)



19-29: Catch some cool animated indie shorts at the always-hip **Sundance Film Festival** in Park City, Utah (<http://festival.sundance.org/2006>). For even more alt flavors, try **Slamdance** through the 27th (www.slamdance.com).



20: Kate Beckinsale and Scott Speedman reprise their roles in the vampires-and-werewolves fantasy sequel, *Underworld: Evolution*. Directed by Len Wiseman, the film also stars veteran British thespians Derek Jacobi and Bill Nighy.



24: You can enjoy 95-minutes-worth of Nickelodeon's wonderful *Avatar: The Last Airbender* (Book 1, Vol. 1) on DVD today. Also available for your player today is Bandai's *Planetes, Volume 5* and Manga Ent.'s *Ghost in the Shell: Season 2, Volume 3*. TV execs, buyers and producers will find themselves drawn to the Mandalay Bay Resort in Las Vegas for the annual **NATPE** market through the 26th (www.natpe.org).



27: Watch Emma Thompson follow in the footsteps of Mary Poppins in the hit British import, *Nanny McPhee*. The fantasy family movie also stars Colin Firth and Angela Lansbury.

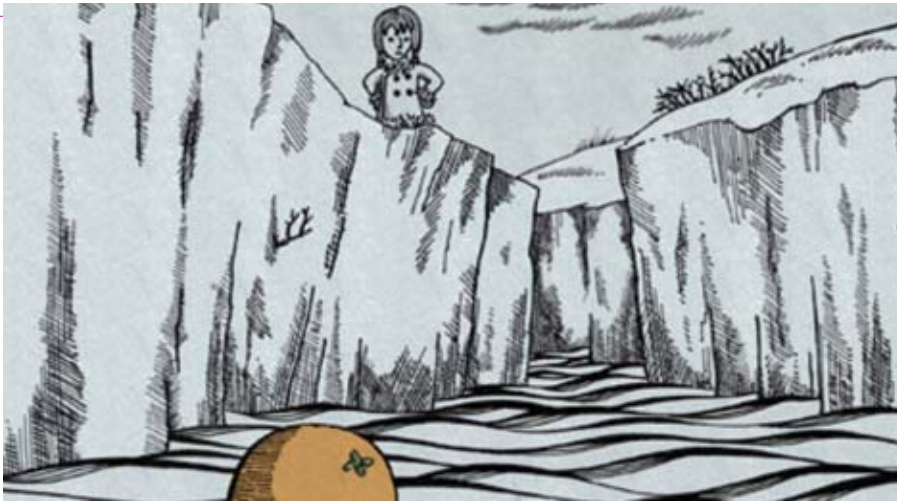


31: DePatie-Freleng's unusual cult animated series, *Here Comes the Grump*, comes out of the 1969-1971 vault and into the DVD world today. If you are in Toronto today, you have a chance to enjoy the **Jewish Animation Celebration** (www.awn.com/tais).



To get your company's events and products listed in this monthly calendar, please e-mail sgurman@animationmagazine.net

FRAME-BY-FRAME



Winter's Warm Reception

by Sarah Gurman

When Andy and Amy Collen, the husband and wife co-founders of Portland-based **Happy Trails Animation**, began working on their short *Winter* (*En Hiver*) they strove for an understated style to deliver a universal message about the nature of coping with hardship. It seems the animation festival circuit has received their message loud and clear, as Happy Trail's six-minute baby has garnered honors around the world, including a Telly, the



Crystal Heart at the Heartland Film Festival, 2nd place at Bulgaria's Computer Space and the Audience Choice Award at the Melbourne Int'l Animation Festival.

Set in an ethereal snow-blanketed countryside in the late 1800s, *Winter* presents the struggles of a young girl dealing with her mother's declining health. Equipped with warm clothes, an orange and her shaggy dog, the girl goes for a walk in the winter wonderland and finds herself challenged physically and emotionally. The obstacles she encounters in this vast white landscape poignantly mirror her complicated home situation.

The film's water colored quill pen on paper look is done almost entirely in black and white with a few key colored elements. Andy and Amy admire Edward Gorey's illustrative style and the work of Hayao Miyazaki, and they aimed to combine these artists' visual approaches in their short. "We were interested in trying to create a Western style of Anime," Andy explains. The project took two years and initially, the husband and wife team inked the frames by hand, but finding the right pen proved problematic and they ended up completing their short digitally with the help of Bauhaus' Mirage and Wacom Cintiq tablets.

In addition to *Winter's* minimal look there are no verbal devices to explain the animation, only the music and images speak for the film. "Animation has been a great tool to cross many barriers," Andy notes "We wanted to create a film that spoke to anyone in any language from any country."

Andy and Amy started Happy Trails Animation, a one-stop shop for toon production, in 1991 after spending a few years working freelance. They recently learned that *Winter* will be featured in the first Golden Stars Shorts Fest hitting Los Angeles in February, which might just put Oscar in the mood for a snow day. ■

You can watch *Winter* (*En Hiver*) and find out more about Happy Trails Animation at www.happytrailsanimation.com.

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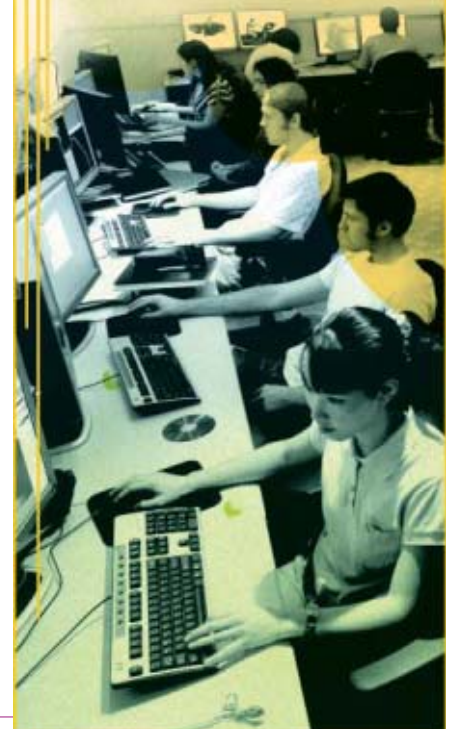
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Pixar's 20th Birthday Bash at MoMA

by Charles Solomon

"Pixar's work, both the preparatory artwork and the finished work on the screen is a major force in contemporary art: high art, low art, choose your art," says Steve Higgins, curator of film and media at the Museum of Modern Art. "Film is a modern art form, and Pixar is one of the finest examples of mainstream filmmaking today."

Beginning December 14, MoMA will present *Pixar: 20 Years of Animation*, an overview of the award-winning studio's films and the artwork used in their creation. The show, which will run through February 6, includes gallery displays, multi-media installations and screenings of all the Pixar shorts and features. The museum has a long history of honoring the often neglected art of animation, including exhibits on the Walt Disney, UPA, Warner Bros. and Hubley Studios.

"We wanted to ensure that Pixar was seen as part of the continuum of the history of animation: There's a popular notion that they just press a button and a film pops out of the computer," Higgins continues. "The computer may be the latest tool used to put the animation on the screen, but the tried and true and traditional methods of developing stories and characters for 2D animated films are honored and built upon at Pixar."

MoMA had been interested in a Pixar exhibit for some time, but the expansion of the museum's main facility in Manhattan meant that no space was available for almost four years. The completion of the renovations in 2004



Tia Kratter, Sullivan fur pattern studies, *Monsters Inc.*

enabled MoMA and Pixar to plan a 20th anniversary exhibit that would honor the individual artists, rather than the corporate entity.

"I never in my wildest dreams expected my drawings to hang in MoMA," says *Monsters, Inc.* director Pete Docter. "This artwork wasn't made to be seen by the public, unlike most of the art in MoMA. These works



John Ranf, Storyboard, *Toy Story*

were done to make the movies. Many of them are pretty amazing pieces, but it's interesting to see what influence a specific piece did—or didn't—have on the finished film."

"There are about 500 pieces in the exhibition, including animation thumbnails, storyboards, character model sheets and a lot of concept art," adds Ron Magliozzi, film and media department assistant curator of research and collections. "Pixar does a huge amount of research and development, discovering the world of each film. We were very impressed that so much of that work is painted, drawn and sculpted. We selected things from Pixar that resonate with pieces in other areas of the museum. It's not something we make a statement about, but the relationships are there."

Docter feels that the most exciting work in the exhibit will be the three-dimensional zoetrope, inspired by one at Studio Ghibli Museum in Tokyo. Dozens of sculptures of the *Toy Story* characters in sequential poses stand on a large turntable: When it spins, a strobe light comes on, creating the illusion of motion.

"We're using a 3D printer that takes the data and outputs it as a 3D model, so it's the model we've been working with in the computer," Docter concludes with a nervous laugh. "There are 18 statues of each character, and the disc revolves once a second. You step up to it, and the characters really come to life. We hope to have it finished by the opening; if not, it'll be a work-in-progress that we'll add to every week or so." ■

The Museum of Modern Art is located at 11 West 53 Street, New York, NY 10019-5497. For exhibition hours, admission and other information, call (212) 708-9400 or visit www.moma.org. Chronicle Books has also published *The Art of Pixar*, a beautiful collection of 100 Collectible Postcards in celebration of the animation studio's anniversary (\$16.95). Visit www.chroniclebooks.com for more info.

Ocon Cozies Up to Dibo

by Sarah Gurman

Having recently earned a Star Project Award from The Korea Culture and Content Agency (KOCCA), Seoul-based toon house Ocon has officially completed fundraising on its new 3D animated series *Dibo the Gift Dragon*. The playful 52x11 minute series, which received a Special Mention Jury Prize at Cartoons on the Bay, takes place in Cozy Land, a built-for-comfort fantasy world where everything is made from soft fabrics. In addition to the snuggle-worthy setting, the show's star, Dibo a doll-dragon who delivers presents to his buddies every day, is bound to leave you with a warm fuzzy feeling after each episode. (We don't think Dibo is a fire-breather, by the way!)

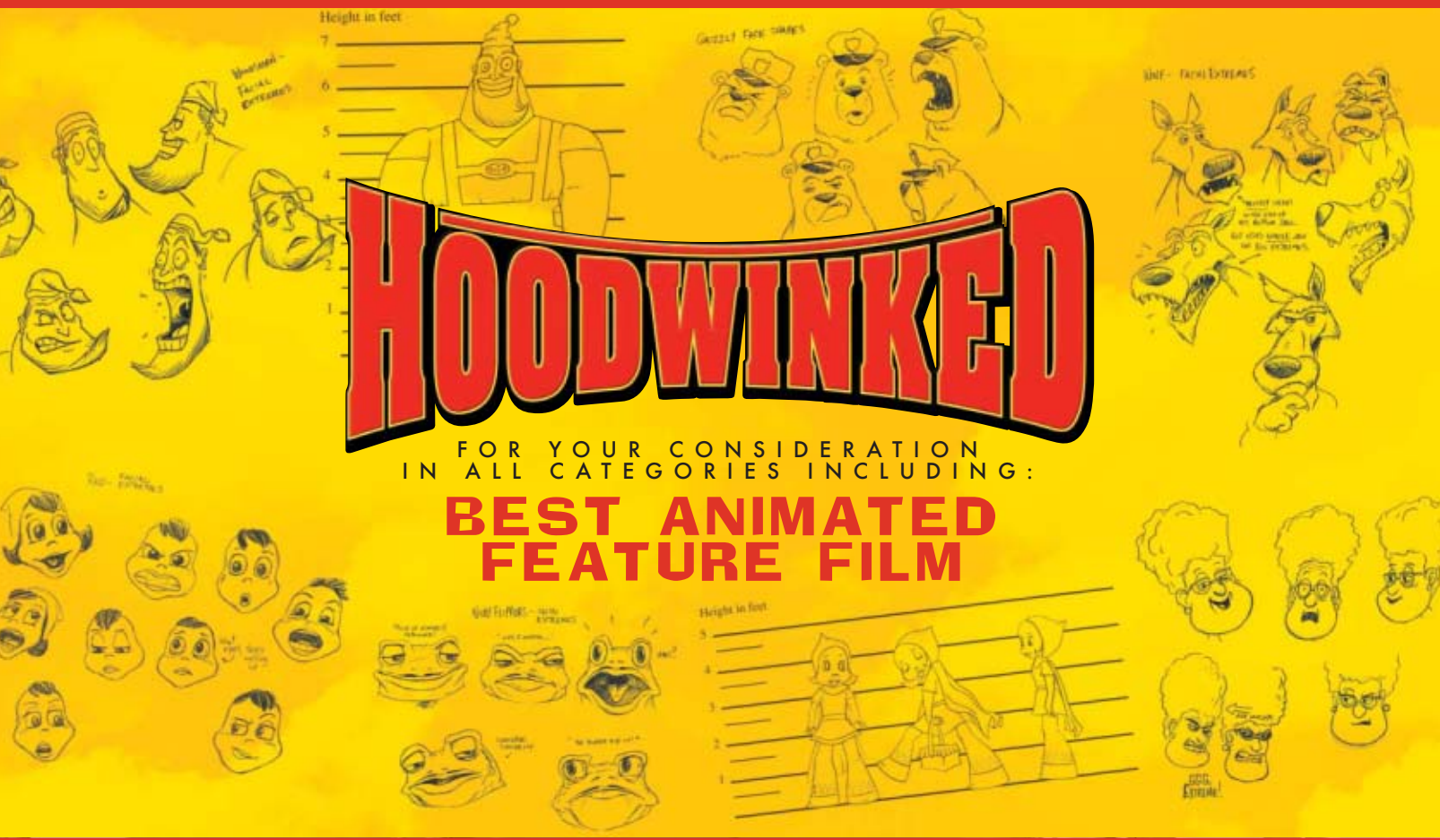
Ocon was one of three companies from 40 entrants to receive KOCCA's Star Project Award which is designed to bolster promising Korean animated projects. KOCCA also presented the honor to Ffango Entertainment's *Tales of Greenery* and Sunwoo Entertainment's *Mix Master*. Since its launch in 2002, the Star Project Competition has developed into one of KOCCA's most popular support initiatives. Winners gain marketing and business development support courtesy of KOCCA, as well as renown within the global animation community.

"Ocon attracted enough financing required to complete production on *Dibo the Gift Dragon*, and we also received investment proposals from international studios who have shown great interest in this project," notes Ocon USA VP Derek Lee. "We are deeply grateful for the recognition the KOCCA Star Award has given this innovative property."

Established in 1996 with a focus on CG animation, Ocon has worked on a variety of popular TV properties, including *Taekwon Family*, *The Island of Inis Cool* and *Pororo*. Ocon was the first Korean production house to adopt a motion-capture studio and has gone on



to create stellar visuals for clients like Samsung and Hyundai Motors. The L.A.-based branch, Ocon USA, is currently seeking a global distributor for their sociable CG pal *Dibo*. For more information visit: www.ocon.co.kr ■



Stuff These (In Your Stocking)!

Six Hot Games for the Holidays. by Ryan Ball

There's a new video game coming out where you have to survive a holiday shopping experience at the local mall as merchandisers charge after you with more tenacity than rampaging dinosaurs and brain-craving zombies. The goal is to collect as much stuff as you can and spend as little as possible, all while dodging the venomous sprays of overzealous perfume counter girls. Okay, it's not a game yet. It's reality. But, luckily for you, there's at least one gamer on your list and checking that one off is fairly easy, if you know what you're looking for. Check out a few of our picks.

King Kong

One game that's sure to make it on most gamers' wish lists is Peter Jackson's *King Kong: The Official Game of the Movie* from Ubisoft. Available for PlayStation 2, Xbox, Xbox 360, GameCube and PSP, the game was produced at Ubisoft's Montpellier studio in the South of France under the direction of Michel Ancel, the creative force behind the company's critically acclaimed *Beyond Good and Evil*. In addition to winning over critics, the title garnered the most nominations at the 2005 Spike TV Video Game Awards, which airs on

Dec. 10.

The *King Kong* game first casts the player in the role of Jack Driscoll, the film's dashing hero played by

Adrien Brody (*The Pianist*). After arriving on mysterious Skull Island, Jack must defend himself and the rest of the crew against angry natives, prehistoric beasts and oversized insects. Then, once Kong shows up, the player gets to take control of the 25-foot-tall ape and smack around some of those dinosaurs that have been plaguing Jack and company. The action is intense, and the graphics and animation look amazing. This is sure to be one of the season's best-selling games, especially if Universal's \$200 million remake is the blockbuster it promises to be.

GUN

The HBO original series *Deadwood* revived the



genre to the game space in grand fashion. Set in the American West of the mid 1800s, the game casts the player in the role of Colton White, who goes up against corrupt lawmen, a murderous preacher and a renegade army of psychopaths in his quest to find out who killed his father. A challenging third/first-person shooter, it offers training levels that allow you to practice such tasks as shooting, riding a horse and shooting from a moving horse. The storyline was crafted by screenwriter Randall Jahnson (*The Mask of Zorro*, *The Doors*) and an all-star voice cast includes Thomas Jane (*The Punisher*), Kris Kristofferson (*Blade*), Ron Perlman (*Hellboy*), Tom Skerrit (TV's *Picket Fences*), Brad Dourif (*Deadwood*) and Lance Henriksen (*Alien Vs. Predator*). Developed by Neversoft, *Gun* is rated "M" for Mature and is available for Xbox and Playstation 2.

Tony Hawk's American Wasteland

Tony Hawk's American Wasteland was released by Activision this fall and should do brisk holiday business.

What's unique about this addictive game is

the absence of load screens, which means players can experience continuous skating and BMX biking action within the massive skateboarding mecca that is Los Angeles.

Developed by Neversoft, the game is rated "T" for Teen due to some crude humor and language, and, yes, lots of blood. Pick it up on Xbox, Xbox 360, PlayStation 2 and GameCube.

Infected

This year's big-ticket item is, of course, Microsoft's Xbox 360, the first next-generation console



to make it to market. However, last year's hot

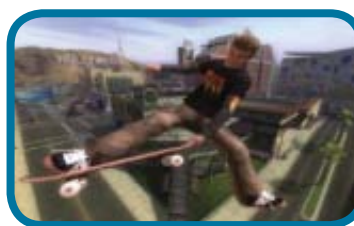
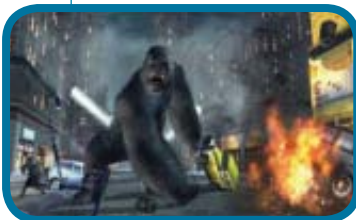
commodity, Sony's handheld PSP (PlayStation Portable), still has a lot of heat, and game makers are taking full advantage of its strengths. Nothing says holiday entertainment like a good apocalyptic zombie game, and Majesco's *Infected* brings the ho-ho-horror and new meaning to the concept of viral marketing. This one-of-a-kind, Mature-rated game from Planet Moon Studios invites players to infect the world with their PSPs via the unit's built-in Wi-Fi capability. Multiplayer victories allow a user's unique avatar to spread to other game units around the world, which serves as an efficient way to taunt defeated competitors.

Ratchet & Clank: Deadlocked, Jak X: Combat Racing

A pair of recent franchise entries that should make a lot of lists are Sony Computer Entertainment America's *Ratchet & Clank: Deadlocked* and *Jak X: Combat Racing*. *Deadlocked* from Insomniac Games has our heroes held prisoner

and forced to star in a gladiatorial reality show. The game allows co-op play in story mode, and a new mission-structure approach rewards players with a constant progression of items such as weapons, armor and body parts. Players can also mod the heck out of their weapons and jump around at will given the non-linear quality of the missions. *Jak X*, the fourth installment from developer Naughty Dog, offers 45 minutes of cinematics and takes a cue from DVD producers by including such bonus features as animator commentary on cut scenes, making-of featurettes and bloopers. In addition, the engine keeps the action fast and seamless by drawing only the portion of track being used, and allows

players to import characters from other *Jak* and *Ratchet & Clank* games via memory. Both games are available for PlayStation 2. ■





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Season of the Witch

Traveller's Tales Casts a Spell with Buena Vista Games' *Chronicles of Narnia*. **by Ryan Ball**

Making a two-hour movie based on a beloved literary classic is one thing, but creating an immersive world that fans are going to spend days trying to master really requires the right touch. Andy Burrows, designer/associate producer for game developer Traveller's Tales, tells us the task of honoring the timeless yarn by C.S. Lewis, as well as the new cinematic adaptation from Disney and Walden Media, was both daunting and exhilarating.

"Obviously, C.S. Lewis' *Chronicles of Narnia* holds a very special place in the hearts of a lot of people, including those of us who worked on the game, so the last thing that we wanted to do was to create something that didn't sit well with either the fiction or the magical land that Lewis created," Burrows remarks. "At the same time, opportunities such as this do not come around very often, and to be able to create the game of the movie was a truly exciting prospect."

The crew at Traveller's Tales found itself serving two masters. While the film's director, Andrew Adamson (*Shrek*), was around to make sure the game stayed true to his vision, getting C.S. Lewis' world right meant

working closely with Douglas Gresham, Lewis' stepson and a member of the estate that monitors all things *Narnia*.

In the game, players take on the roles of Peter, Edmund, Susan and Lucy Pevensie, employing teamwork to battle the armies of the White Witch and release Narnia from the oppression of a 100-year winter. The 15 levels of gameplay present unique challenges and such menacing foes as Minotaurs, Minoboars, Cyclops, Werewolves, Ankleslicers and Boggles.

Buena Vista Games really wanted to make the game an extension of the movie and even managed to work in more than 30 actual clips from the film for players to unlock. According to Burrows, this meant pulling out all the stops for the game's visuals. "Having a realistic graphical style for the game is crucial as we blend directly into the game from footage of the movie," he says. "This would have been impossible if the game had been done in a cartoon style."

Burrows tells us it was also important to have their own cut-scene animations blend with the gameplay. "For example, we wouldn't want our characters running at

the end of the cut scene if they were then standing dead still when the player returned to the game," he explains.

Synergy between the film and game crews began early on as Traveller's Tales was supplied with concept art so they could get a feel for the visual tone of the movie. Then, once shooting began, they received dailies—DVDs containing footage being shot each day. "The dailies were invaluable for getting the levels of the game to closely resemble the wintry land of Narnia, and they allowed us to position the game camera so that we could mimic scenes from the movie exactly," Burrows comments.

The film's composer, Harry Gregson-Williams, served as a consultant on the game's original score, which was recorded by a full orchestra. In addition, the film's effects crew shared



motion-capture data so Burrows and his animators could see how the various creatures moved and behaved. Burrows was also amused by the behavior of other creatures from the movie, namely its four child actors, who came in to record voice tracks and give the game a whirl. These sessions were taped and are included as a bonus feature in the game. ■

Buena Vista Games' *Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe* is available for Playstation 2, Xbox, GameCube, PC Game Boy Advance and Nintendo DS. Handheld versions were developed by Amaze Ent. The movie from Disney and Walden Media enchants theaters on Dec. 9.



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Fairy Tales from the Hood

The Weinstein Co. and Kanbar Ent. ride on to the scene with the clever CG-animated indie feature, *Hoodwinked!* by Ryan Ball

FEATURE

We all know the tale of how Little Red Riding Hood is lured to her grandmother's cottage only to fall victim to the big, bad, cross-dressing wolf, and how the brave, axe-wielding woodsman comes to the rescue. But, as with any story, there's more than one side. *Hoodwinked!*, a computer-animated feature film being distributed by the Weinstein Co. this Christmas, picks up where the fairy tale leaves off, lodging a criminal investigation to comically explore every angle of this famous case of domestic disturbance.

Hoodwinked! is the first film from Kanbar Animation Studio, a company founded by SKYY Vodka entrepreneur Maurice Kanbar and former Disney Animation exec Sue Bea Montgomery. The fractured Brothers Grimm fairy tale is the product of another set of siblings, Cory Edwards

and Todd Edwards, who got the attention of Kanbar with their sci-fi holiday special, *Wobots*. The brothers co-wrote and co-directed *Hoodwinked!* with college pal Tony Leech and were lucky enough to see their story voiced by the likes of Anne Hathaway (*The Princess Diaries*), Glenn Close (*Tarzan II*), Jim Belushi (*According to Jim*), Andy Dick (*Less Than Perfect*) and Patrick Warburton

(*The Venture Brothers*).

A Studio Is Born

To produce the Maya-based animation for under \$20 million, Montgomery and producer David Lovegren set up Digital Eye Candy Studio in a 5,000-square-foot studio in capital city of Manila, in the Philippines. To further speed up the production, an Indian animation team was later brought on to finish the detailed lighting of more than 1,300 digital shots.

Much of Digital Eye Candy's crew came from ImaginAsia, an animation company that Lovegren worked with before it closed approximately three years ago. Lovegren and Montgomery flew to the Philippines, interviewed





Showing His Teeth: The Wolf (voiced by Patrick Warburton) is arrested at Granny's house, the scene of his breaking-and-entering offense. Eventually, the muzzle comes off and he gets to tell his side of the story, as do the other parties involved in the fairy-tale incident.

artists and rented a mansion to house the modest staff and the requisite equipment. Despite the makeshift nature of the operation, it would eventually become a permanent home for a team originally assembled for one picture.



Laurento "Ringjo" Fua



Martin Sacramento



Terence "Chi" Roldan



Augustin "Wings" Numeriano

"When this film was over, my colleagues and I got together and said, 'Hey, now we've got a studio! Let's keep making animated features,'" recalls Stuart Neumann, director of operations for Digital Eye Candy. He insists that they plan on



keeping everyone on board for future projects, rather than laying off artists and hiring them back when they need them, as often happens in the U.S.

Making an animated feature as the production facility is being built is no easy task. DreamWorks did it with *Shrek* and Disney followed suit with *Chicken*

Little, but they had the luxury of being part of a studio system. The ranks at Digital Eye Candy had to work fast and loose to produce a movie in three years, roughly the



same time it takes the big boys to crank out one. Actually, animation for *Hoodwinked!* was completed inside of six months.

"Since we were in a rush, we had to basically get things rolling as soon as possible," says technical director Martin Sacramento. "Some of the [character] designs, for instance the man in the raccoon suit, were taken directly from the storyboards."

With a starting lineup of just 15 digital artists, the facility wasn't compartmentalized at first, forcing crew members to jump in and help out where needed, be it lighting, environments or rendering. "In the beginning, everyone was kind of a generalist," Neumann comments. "As the picture evolved, they became specialists. Now we have 50 artists over there and people are finding their niche." The pitch-in dynamic established early on

gave the individual artists a greater sense of creative involvement and ownership of the film, which, needless to say, is rare among overseas studios. In some cases, the animators were even allowed to create character performances without detailed direction from the Edwards and Leech.

Squirrely Behavior

Two stand-out characters from *Hoodwinked!* are the casual-cool Wolf and his frantic squirrel side-kick, Twitchy. Wolf, as voiced by Warburton, turns out to be a private investigator out to crack a big case involving Riding Hood's Granny and her secret recipes. Terence "Chi" Roldan, who served as lead animator on the character, tells us the furry gumshoe was patterned after another famous big-screen sleuth. "We watched the *Fletch* movies and studied how Chevy Chase acts. We tried to incorporate Chase's man-



erous production schedule, Sacramento says he would spend more time on R&D. He has been busy compiling a list of applications he wants to experiment with on the next production. High on that queue are such plug-ins as Glass Code for shattering effects, Shave and a Haircut for hair and fur, and SyFlex for cloth simulation. He also wants to work Mental Ray deeper into the pipeline after relying mainly on Maya's native renderer for *Hoodwinked!*, which had to be

nerisms, like how he's so sure of himself but doesn't really know what he's doing."

Imagine a squirrel with a Red Bull habit and you have Twitchy, a character which never sits still throughout the movie. Lead animator Laurento "Ringjo" Fua found inspiration for his animation just outside his window, basing the movements on a real squirrel who occupied the yard outside the studio. "It's quite difficult to time his movements because it's so fast that you have to adjust the number of frames to give him snappy movements," Ringjo comments. He adds that scenes involving dialogue with Twitchy were especially challenging since he sounds like Alvin and the Chipmunks on fast-forward. "I was working from the audio, but they didn't give me a script or anything to read, so I was deciphering it for some time." The time Ringjo spent with Twitchy apparently took its toll. Whereas most animators infuse their characters with bits of their own personalities, he says he found himself acting more and more like a squirrel during the course of production.

Augustin "Wings" Numeriano, one of the crew's most experienced animators, re-rigged many of the Maya blend shapes for the facial animation. This was particularly crucial for the character Japeth, a giddy goat who has to sing every word that comes out of his mouth. According to Wings, manipulating the blend shapes rather than using a dedicated facial system brought a

hand-crafted quality to the animation. In fact, the original directive was to make the entire film look like it was made using the stop-motion technique of model animation. During the course of production, that concept was abandoned for a more CG appearance, but the film retains a lovely, tactile nature that many computer-generated movies lack.

The Next Chapter

While most animation companies cut their teeth by gnawing on a short film, Kanbar Ani-

entirely re-rendered three times to get the desired look. "In some instances, Mental Ray renders faster than Maya in regard to fluids, and it also has a better look, of course, with features such as global illumination," says Sacramento.

Also in the works at the studio is a migration to an all-Linux set up and use of more dual processors. (They're currently using both Intel and AMD units.) "We understand the main reason producers want to do projects in the Philippines, besides the talent, is the overhead is a bit low," Sacramento remarks. "So we have to look at the economic side and try to work on the most efficient system possible. We're not going to be Weta, which has an entire render wall, but we're trying to put resources where they're most necessary."

They're keeping a tight lid on details, but Kanbar is in active development on a second feature film and plans to begin production in early 2006. However, Sacramento and his artists won't have to wait to put their latest R&D efforts to the test.

The team has been busy producing character interview segments and two music videos to promote the feature, which has insiders buzzing about a possible Oscar nomination. ■

The Weinstein Company releases *Hoodwinked!* in 1,500 theaters on December 23.



mation and its Digital Eye Candy Studio were afforded a complete feature to learn on. Financed entirely by Maurice Kanbar, *Hoodwinked!* is an impressive accomplishment to be sure, but it's merely a taste of what's ahead for the new contender in the world of CG theatrical releases.

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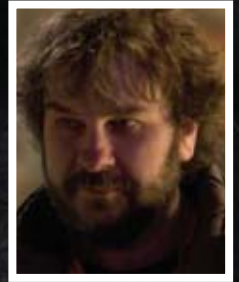
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Peter Jackson

Credit: Weta Digital LTD/Universal Studios

Meet This Year's Simian Superstar!

Our reporter goes ape over Weta's mo-cap and digital effects for Peter Jackson's much-anticipated remake of *King Kong*. by Ron Magid

FEATURE

Like the 1933 *King Kong*, Peter Jackson's lavish remake depends on the performance of its leading man (uh, or gorilla)—the 24-foot-tall simian that haunts Skull Island.

While the original's eyepopping visuals were a groundbreaking mix of full-scale props and stop-motion puppet animation, Jackson selected a post-digital equivalent to bring his Kong to life: a daring blend of CG hand animation, live-performance capture and miniature environments enhanced with digital matte paintings. A vast crew, under Weta Workshop co-director/design and effects supervisor Richard Taylor, was needed for Kong and an island full of fantastical creatures: vfx supervisor Joe Letteri; animation directors Christian Rivers and co-screenwriters/producers Fran



Credit: Weta Digital LTD/Universal Studios

Walsh and Philippa Boyens; vfx director of photography Alex Funke; sculptors Miles Teves, Gus Hunter and Jamie Beswarick, who created the original Kong design; and Gino Acevedo who

devised the paint scheme and oversaw the critical texture painting.

This talented lot, plus hundreds of workshop artists, would all work in concert with that uniquely talented actor, Andy Serkis, who brought Gollum so convincingly to life in *The Lord of the Rings* and now portrays Kong via motion capture. Serkis' experience on set no doubt enhanced Kong's sense of isolation: wearing a gorilla muscle suit (kindly provided by Howard Berger of KNB), he was positioned on ladders, scissor-lifts and platforms high above the stage and fellow actors—Jack Black as impresario Carl Denham, Adrien Brody as screenwriter Jack Driscoll and Naomi Watts as Ann, the object of Kong's affections.

"Naomialways had my eyes so every



Richard Taylor



Andy Serkis



Joe Letteri



Credit: Weta Digital LTD/Universal Studios



Credit: Pierre Vinet/Universal Studios

Beauty and the Beast: Technology has come a long way since the original 1933 *King Kong* feature, directed by Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack. Oscar-nominated actress Naomi Watts reprises the role made famous by Fay Wray in the classic, while Gollum stand-in Andy Serkis gets under the digital skin of the big ape in Peter Jackson's version.

that Kong's feet ended at my knees," Serkis says. "So as I was knuckle walking, I was resting my hands on these benches while my feet were on the floor. I had to be able to accelerate from aught to 60, so we had these long runs of

benches, and we plotted out the journey. I acted on podiums for the entire two months."

Elevating his hands off the ground greatly helped "cheat" the human mo-cap data into more Kong-like proportions, but it was only part of the solution. "We captured Andy's entire leg then mapped it onto a shorter proportional leg for the gorilla," explains Rivers, who co-directed Serkis' mo-cap performance with Walsh and Boyens. "Although Andy could hyper-extend his legs, we would later adjust that in motion editing."

But the biggest improvement in Weta's mo-cap technique was the new facial system designed by Mark Sagar; it utilized a staggering 132 reflective markers hand-applied to Serkis' visage. The only limitation: facial capture employed an entirely different mo-cap camera, which demanded a much smaller stage—about two



meters square—restricting action.

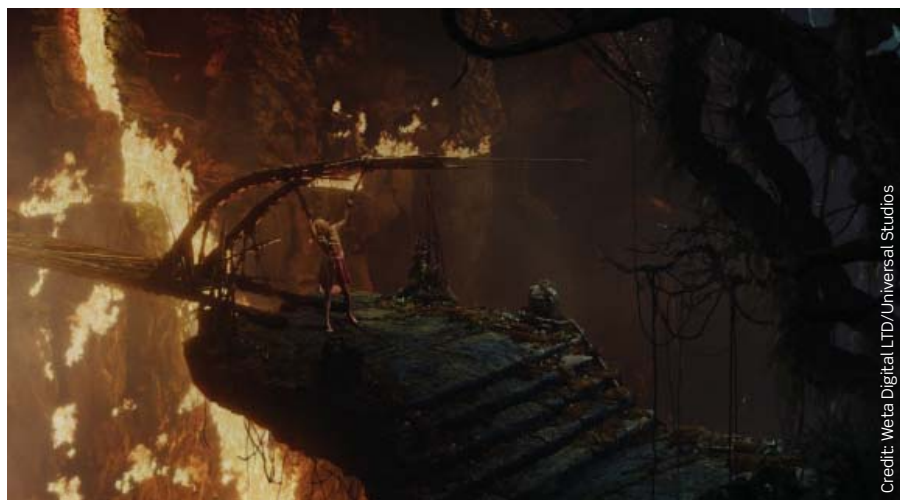
Although Rivers had supervised the digital previsualization wherein much of Kong's actions were designed, his directing of actors was limited: two weeks of second unit on *The Return of the King*. Going from that to directing the star of the movie is "a helluva big jump," Rivers admits. "Typically Pete would brief us, sometimes not, sometimes Fran and Philippa were both down there and we'd all talk about Kong's performance, but generally we were looking to see what Andy wanted to bring to the character. When he had to do certain actions like pick up Ann, we'd let Andy explore the timing and the motivations for doing that. (He had many different Ann dolls that were dressed suitably for each moment, including a ragdoll filled with lead balls to give her appropriate weight and a bit of resistance.) If you direct an actor to go from a to b to c, he just becomes a puppet, and that wasn't the point of getting Andy in the mo-cap suit—it was to get in touch with Kong's soul through Andy."

Once the motion had been captured, sometimes up to a dozen takes, the data was dumped into Maya for



Credit: Weta Digital LTD/Universal Studios

further animation, then rendered via RenderMan as an “eye of god” master with a gray-shaded puppet against blue. “Then Peter would cut the shots together so we had an idea of what he was looking for in Kong—what timing, what performances he liked—he would change the order of the performance just to get the feel and flow he wanted,” says Letteri, who won back-to-back back Oscars for *The Two Towers* and *The Return of the King*. “Then we’d motion edit that data and send it through onto animation. We treated the editing and animation as an initial layout because sometimes we’d be culling the performance together from a bunch of takes. Then we’d lay it out on the [set] geo[metry], find camera angles that looked like they were going to work, and it would serve as a blocking and layout pass until Peter was happy with it. We made all of the decisions based on shots and the flow of the scene. We tried to do everything in parallel as much as possible, so once we had the animation blocked out, we would block out the lighting—when Peter approved final animation, in a lot of cases he would already be seeing Kong with fur and



Credit: Weta Digital LTD/Universal Studios

so forth.”

Ultimately, the animation would pass through countless hands, often augmented with a battery of proprietary software, before finally being composited via Shake. This to the tune of a *The Return of the King*-sized 2,000 shots. “I think it’s a testament to the collaborative nature of a very large community of filmmakers who have focused on creating a totally feasible, tangible, believable, and invigorating character-filled creature,” says Taylor. “Kong has to transcend an animal and become a

character in his own right and play off Naomi’s great acting skills with equal, if not greater, presence and ability.”

If that is the case, then Jackson’s film will prove a worthy companion to the original *King Kong*. “People are expecting a monster movie,” Serkis concludes. “I think it’s going to be quite a surprise emotionally.” ■

Universal’s *King Kong* opens in movie theaters on December 14. Ron Magid is a Los Angeles-based journalist and author. He recently worked on the DVD re-release of the 1933 *King Kong*.

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Your Guide to the 2005 Oscar Race

[Part 1 of 3]



Will Plasticine Put CG in Its Place?

by Ramin Zahed

Dickens had it so right! This past year was both the best of times and the worst of times—for animated features that is! On one level, moviegoers around the world saw amazing breakthroughs in technology and the quality of CG animation. On the other hand, there were also some disappointments when it came to writing,

originality and the performance of the films at the box office. So what does this all mean for our favorite animated projects when Oscar time rolls around?

"I think it's been a phenomenal year," says Pixar maestro John Lasseter (*Toy Story 1 and 2*, *Bug's Life* and next summer's *Cars*), who is also a member of the Board of Governors of the Academy of

Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. "It's probably the strongest year we've had since the inception of the Feature Animation Oscar. If you look at the films of 2005, you see that there are examples of great animation in different formats. There's a great hand-drawn film, a wonderful puppet animated feature, a fantastic plasticine feature, in addition to



Terrific Ten: The titles eligible for this year's Feature Animation Oscar are, clockwise from top left, *Steamboy*, *Hoodwinked!*, *Tim Burton's Corpse Bride*, *Valiant*, *Madagascar*, *Wallace & Gromit—The Curse of the Were-Rabbit*, *Robots*, *Chicken Little* and *Howl's Moving Castle*. Also running in the race (but not pictured above) is Pentamedia Graphics' *Gulliver's Travels*.

FEATURE

the great CG-animated titles. In fact, anyone who says traditional animation is dead can be proven wrong just by looking at this year's contenders."

The ten contenders vying for the three spots on the Feature Animation ballot are, Disney's first in-house CG effort *Chicken Little*, Tim Burton's *Corpse Bride* (Warner Bros.), Wallace & Gromit: *The Curse of the Were-Rabbit* (Aardman/DreamWorks), Hayao Miyazaki's *Howl's Moving Castle* (Disney), the big summer CG hit *Madagascar* (DreamWorks), Fox/Blue Sky's *Robots*, Katsuhiro Otomo's CG/2D anime *Steamboy* (Sony), and three CG projects from indie toon houses, Vanguard Animation's *Valiant*, Kanbar Entertainment's *Hoodwinked!* (distributed by The Weinstein Co.) and *Gulliver's Travels* (from India's Pentamedia Graphics).

Absent from the list were Disney's first-quarter 2D toon, *Pooh's Heffalump Movie* and Japanese helmer Shinji Aramaki's anime offering *Appleseed*.

"In previous years, we had a horse race between a couple of prominent, popular features," says Jon Bloom, chair of the Short Film and Feature Animation Branch of the Academy. "In 2005, we have a broader field of very strong films, but no 600-pound gorillas!"

Bloom also explains that since the rules require 16 or more animated eligible releases to trigger a five-title race, the field will be limited to only three nominees again this year.

If there's one thing we know for sure in December it is that there are few toon lovers who are not rooting for Nick Park and his plasticine heroes, Wallace and Gromit. Although DreamWorks Animation had higher financial expectations for *Wallace & Gromit: The Curse of the Were-Rabbit*, the feature has been one of the best-reviewed movies of the year, period. Plus, the movie has performed exceedingly well internationally and it has surpassed the \$120 million mark globally. Park is no stranger to the Oscars, as two of his shorts *The Wrong*

Trousers and *A Close Shave* have won the award in previous years, while his *A Grand Day Out* was nominated.

"It's a notable achievement because it's very difficult to take characters and ideas from a short-format project and adapt them to a long format," says animation expert and author Leonard Maltin. "*The Curse of the Were-Rabbit* retains all the wonderful qualities of the shorts without overstaying its welcome or diluting what made the shorts so good originally."

Maltin also praises the hand-made



"It's probably the strongest year we've had since the inception of the Feature Animation Oscar. If you look at the [eligible] films of 2005, you see that there are examples of great animation in all different formats."

—Oscar-winning director and writer
John Lasseter



quality of Park's effort. "I swear I saw a thumb-print on at least one shot, and it might have been done deliberately as a badge of honor," he says. "And I say bully for them. In contrast to that, I felt some disappointment at *Corpse Bride*, because the creators wanted to celebrate this wonderful stop-motion technique, but the finished product looks so perfect that it looks like CG, thereby they defeated their own mission."

Also on his hot list is the Blue Sky/Fox feature *Robots*, directed by Chris Wedge and Carlos Saldanha with character design by acclaimed illustrator William Joyce. "I cut the movie a lot of slack because it looked great," says Maltin. "The production and character design was so rich and brimming with imagination and humor, that I was willing to forgive its story's shortcomings."

Positioned high on Maltin's list of 2005 favorites is Hayao Miyazaki's off-beat feature *Howl's Moving Castle*. Although Miyazaki and Studio Ghibli have already won the Feature Animation Oscar for *Spirited Away* in 2003, they

have another shot this year thanks to Miyazaki's magical touch and mastery of the traditional 2D form. "I think *Howl* is the towering achievement of the year," notes Maltin. "It has to be considered the film to beat in a competitive field. I liked it even better than *Spirited Away*. It's an enchanting movie and offers something that very few movies offer—genuine surprise. You never know where it's going. You have no idea whether it's going to be funny, melancholy, tragic or mystical."

Of course, it would be unwise to ignore the year's powerful studio CG numbers such as DreamWorks' summer blockbuster *Madagascar* and Disney's CG crowd-pleaser *Chicken Little*. Although neither took the art form in blazing new directions, they did what they set out to do, which was to keep family audiences entertained for a couple of hours.

As we went to press for this issue, only a handful of people had seen The Weinstein Company's *Hoodwinked!*, which marks the maiden voyage for Kanbar Entertainment. Look out for this clever year-end offering from brothers Cory and Todd Edwards. The writing and character design are as sharp and zingy as anything else the big studios have released all year.

The real mystery guest this year is India's *Gulliver's Travels*. This CG-animated feature was produced by Pentamedia Graphics, which will have to screen it in Los Angeles before the year's end to qualify for the race. According to reports in Indian trade publications, the movie was made for \$4.5 million. Pentamedia also managed to deliver a last-minute contender last year with its traditionally animated *The Legend of Buddha*. In short, count on plenty of drama and surprises for animation fans when the 78th Academy Awards are broadcast on ABC on Sunday March 5. ■

Next month, read all about the unpredictable Visual Effects Oscar race, and get the skinny on the Shorts category in our March issue.



Gil Alkabetz

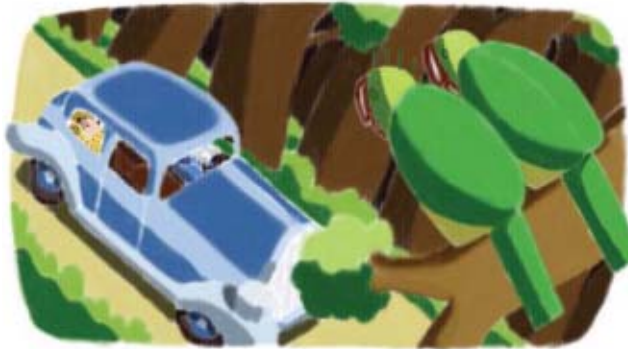
A Pair of Parrots Sing About the Past

Gil Alkabetz's *Morir de Amor* may be one of the best animated shorts of the year. **by Ramin Zahed**

There are many reasons Gil Alkabetz's charming short *Morir de Amor* (Dying of Love) has received numerous awards since it began its run around the festival circuit this past year. Not only is the 12-minute short beautifully and painstakingly animated (in the tradition of wonderful cell-animated shorts of the past), it has a great storyline and a bittersweet ending that stays with viewers for a long time.

Without giving away too much, the short centers on two old parrots whose memories are jogged by a classic romantic song playing on their owner's phonograph. As the birds remember specific sounds and music from their shared past, their aging owner makes a surprising and sad discovery about his own life.

Animation fans may recall Alkabetz's tour-de-force work on Tom Tykwer's 1998 indie hit *Run Lola Run*. However, the Israeli-born animator has been working consistently since he made a big splash with his first animated project, the short *Bitzbutz*, in 1984. The talented 48-year-old tells us he's been happily surprised by the warm reception his work has been getting of late. "I knew it had a kind of complicated



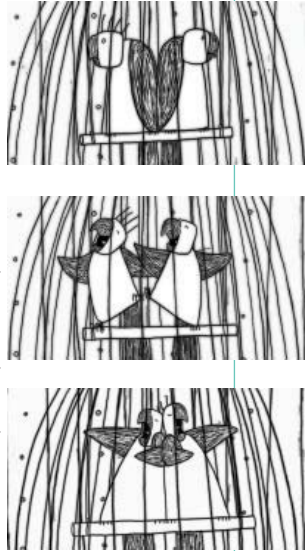
structure, and on the other hand, it wasn't full of wild inventions like many other good films have," he says via e-mail. "Actually, while making it, I had no idea how it would be received."

Alkabetz says he was a bit afraid of taking the short to Latin America. "I was happiest to hear that audiences in South America, for example, in Argentina and Brazil, liked the film. I have never been there, so I was afraid they would take the film as a fraud, but they seemed to like it a lot and that made me happy!"

So how did he come up with the parrots and the nostalgic plotline? "First I had an abstract thought about how music evokes memories. Parrots were a natural choice because they can sing and have a very long life," he recalls. "Then I thought that parrots in nature would actually be found

in Latin America. I preferred that location because I am fond of the music that comes from that part of the world. Then we came across the song 'Morir de Amor' (performed by Charles Aznavour and Compay Segundo) which seemed to be perfect for the film. The song was the kind of tune that one actually sings, in the shower, for example, rather than just listen to it passively."

Alkabetz used a combination of traditional toon-making methods with digital technology to animate his avian flight of fancy. The animation was hand-drawn, then scanned and post-produced on his Apple computer, using



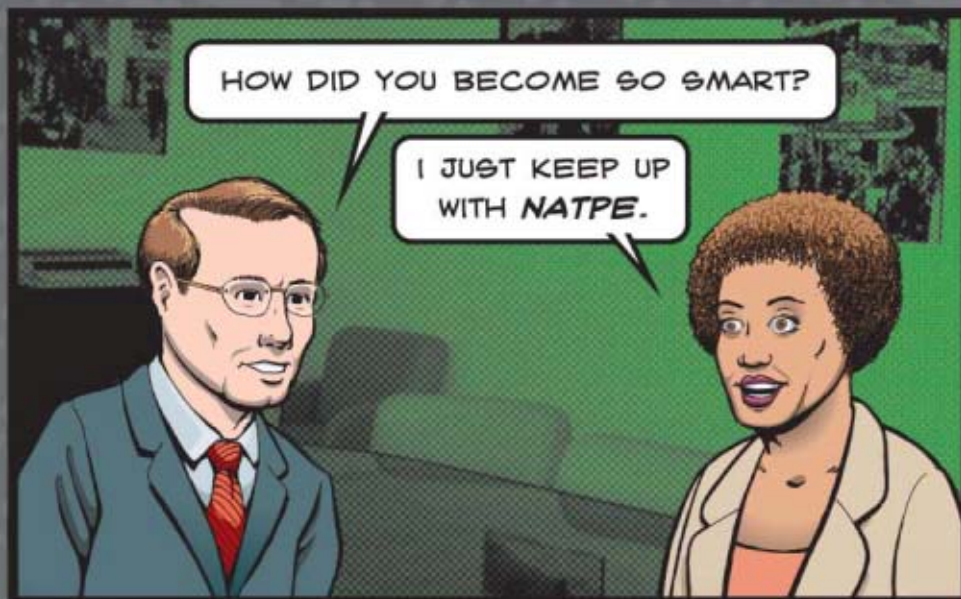
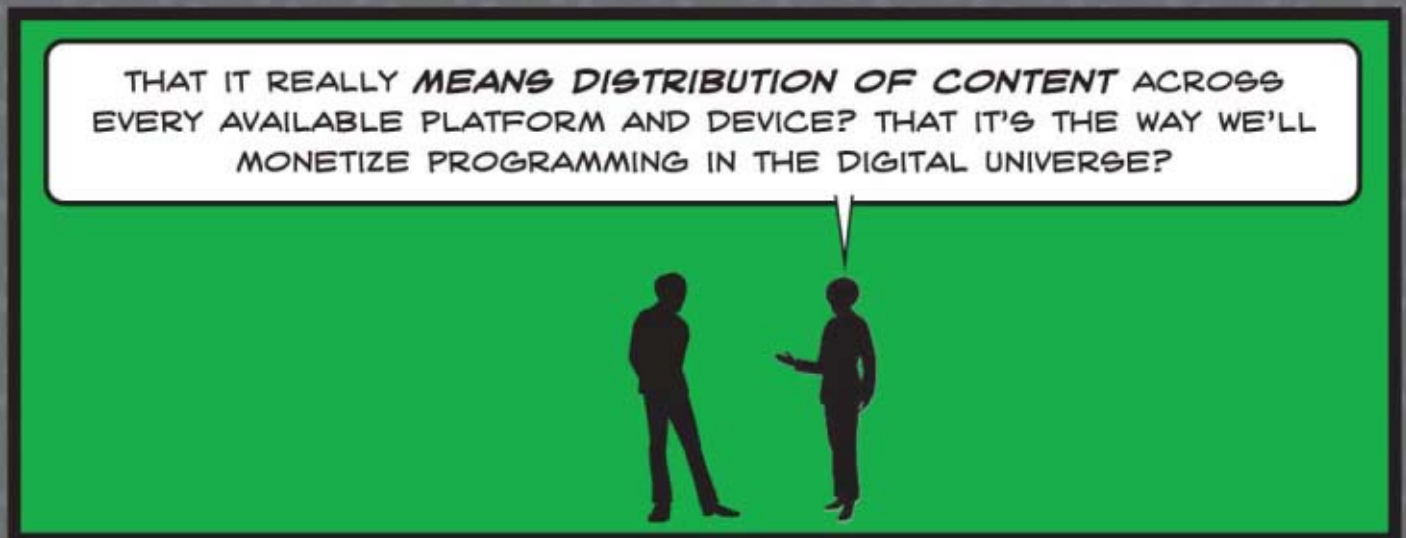
ing Adobe PhotoShop, Corel Painter and Retas! Pro. The colored parts were hand-painted on Wacom and Cintiq graphic tablets.

Alkabetz says he has seen an explosion of creativity in the festival circuit in recent years. "I think that today's animators are less naïve, and, in a way, less pretentious than in the past. There is an ever-growing understanding of the medium including new, clever and surprising uses of 3D technologies."

A fan of artists such as Paul Driessen, Mark Baker, Michaela Pavlatova and Caroline Leaf, Alkabetz confesses that, although he appreciates CG-animated films, he likes to stick with his own traditional methods. "Sometimes, I am thrilled by CG's variety and endless visual potential, but personally, I am not really attracted to its aesthetics. Generally, I prefer stories which are told with understatement—the kind of silent waters that seem harmless at first glance, but bite you unexpectedly!"

Of course, the inevitable question comes up: Does Alkabetz have any parrots of his own? "No," he confesses, "so fortunately, the film is not based on true events!" ■

To find out more about Alkabetz and his award-winning film, visit www.morir-de-amor.com.



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Matt Greenfield

Resurrection of *Eva*!

The ten-year-old anime sci-fi series gets a new lease on life on Cartoon Network and on DVD. **by Patrick Drazen**

Pop culture moves so fast that a ten-year-old TV series isn't just passé; it's extinct. If a cable network announced the broadcast of a ten-year-old animated series, conventional wisdom would suggest the lowest of ratings.

Neon Genesis Evangelion, however, is nowhere near conventional. The landmark Japanese series broke new ground when it premiered in Japan in 1995. In October, Cartoon Network began broadcasting *Evangelion* as part of its after-midnight [adult swim] lineup. Even after a decade, this is one Not-Ready-for-Prime-Time anime.

"We've been talking about it with Cartoon Network for a while," says Matt Greenfield, co-founder of ADV Films and director of the English dub of the series. "The commitment was made just a few months ago."

Cartoon Network sampled the series a few years back, according to Greenfield. "When they ran *Eva* as part of the kids' block, as part of their Giant Robot Week, it had to be edited pretty heavily. The people at Cartoon Network will make any modifications that are necessary, but, if you've watched [adult swim] lately, you

know they'll run just about anything."

That apparently includes the hyper-intense violence, teen angst and skin that's part of what made *Evangelion* an anime phenomenon. The rest of the mix includes demonic four-story-tall robots, obscure Judeo-Christian references and words and images flashed onscreen almost too fast to see. *Evangelion* was created by Studio Gainax, which celebrated its 20th anniversary last year, under the supervision of writer/director Hideaki Anno.

Greenfield sums up *Evangelion's* revolution in a simple formula: "They broke the rules. About every ten years in Japan there's a title that looks at what's come before and restates it. *Eva* said, Okay, we'll present something in the giant robot format. The basic central plot—young boy who's forced into a situation of saving the earth—that's endemic in Japanese sci-fi.

"What *Eva* did was say, Okay, these characters are not going to be likable, the situations are not going to be typical."

It's hard to imagine anything about *Evangelion* that's typical. The target for



the strange, seemingly extra-terrestrial Angels, for instance, isn't Tokyo, the city which has provided a quick snack for Godzilla, a dozen other monsters and anime too numerous to mention. The action here takes place in Tokyo-3, fifty miles from the original city, built because the original was submerged when the polar caps melted. The teenagers who pilot the *Eva* robots in battle against the Angels are hardly the traditional "science team". Instead, we have the curiously emotionless Rei, the brash German-Japanese vamp Asuka and the angst-ridden Shinji, who hates his father, who happens to be in charge of the *Eva* Project.

If you've seen *Evangelion* once, you definitely haven't seen it all. Greenfield notes that this is built into the structure of the series: "It's meant to be watched over and over again. And this affects the delivery of the lines; there has to be twin meanings. The dialogue is feeding you information, leading you down a path that you may not realize until later." Because so many lines are hidden references to later events, Greenfield took special pains to make sure the readings by the voice actors could work with multiple meanings.

As for the overall meaning of the series, that may never be known. Greenfield referred to *Evangelion* as "the world's biggest Rorschach test. *Eva* attempted to tell a very large story and make it a loop. We're never sure if it's all a flashback or if it all took place in Shinji's mind." ■

***Neon Genesis Evangelion* airs on Cartoon Network's [adult swim] after midnight. Check listings on www.adultswim.com. ADV Films has also released a 26-episode set on DVD (\$169.98).**



Spotlight on Santa, Kronk and Meatwad

Here are a few suggestions to help you revamp your DVD
toon library for the holidays. **by Sarah Gorman**

Spike & Mike's Sick and Twisted Festival of Animation: Contagious (Sony Music, \$14.98)

Crude comedy top dog Robin Williams has described the grown-up animated collection of Spike & Mike's festivals as "Disney with tits." The whole enterprise began when Craig 'Spike' Decker and Mike Gribble screened retro toons as they promoted bands in the early '70s. Soon the demand for the shorts overtook the bands, and the boys got cracking on what is now an annual festival that premieres every summer and then travels to all 50 states, screening innovative animation that is often a little rough around the etiquette edges. Classic envelope-pushing shorts including Trey Parker and Matt



Stone's original South Park short, *Spirit of Christmas*, Mike Judge's first two Beavis and Butt-head shorts and Nick Park's classics *A Close Shave*, *The Wrong Trousers* and *A Grand Day Out* were all included in earlier compilations. *Spike & Mike's Sick and Twisted Festival of Animation: Contagious*, the latest DVD collection of risqué shorts serves up 34 hilarious and blush-worthy tracks with fab work from Mike Thompson, Eric Favela, Bill Plympton, Sam Chen and other animated rebels. If you've got a refined taste for the vulgar and a keen cartoon eye for the lewd we suggest you pick up this new release pronto.

Kronk's New Groove (Buena Vista, \$29.99)

If you couldn't get enough of Patrick Warburton's



Kronk one-liners in the 2000 Disney traditionally animated *The Emperor's New Groove*, this is your time to rejoice. Not only has the movie spawned a new TV series, which premieres in early 2006 on The Disney Channel, you can also rush to the DVD stores for a new sequel titled *Kronk's New Groove*. In this round of Aztec boogie down fun, Kronk has moved on from his days as sidekick to femme fatale Yzma and now works as head chef and delivery boy at Mudka's Meat Hut. However, when our loveable cartoon beefcake gets word that his Papi is coming to town, he feels insecure about his status and wants to impress his father who has never given him approval. Kronk finds himself back in cahoots with Yzma, working on a get-rich-quick scheme destined for disaster and laughs. In addition to Patrick Warburton reporting for voice duty for a second bout of Kronk, David Spade, John Goodman and Eartha Kitt all hopped on board to reprise their roles from the original film. Buena Vista's \$29.99 release comes stocked with extras like Kronk's Brain Game and the "Making of" featurette,

continued on page 27

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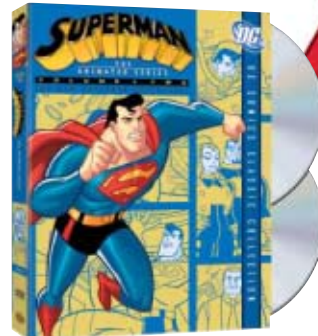
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The Samurai Critic:

The Holiday DVD Gift Edition



Illustration by Dan Hoffstedt

by Charles Solomon

With dozens of new titles being released every month, the anime aisle of the local video store can be a confusing place for someone just getting interested in Japanese animation—or for the parent of a teenager at

holiday time. These titles, which include some of the most original releases of 2005, should win sincere thanks from discerning anime fans; they may even earn the donor a reputation for being hip.

Full Metal Panic Fumoffu, Vols. 1-4 (ADV: \$29.98 each)

Full Metal Panic began as a mixture of



romance, comedy and adventure. For the second season, the filmmakers realized the series was really a romantic comedy and dropped the sci-fi adventure

elements. Kaname is now a reasonably normal high school girl. Sousuke is no longer a member of the Mithril mercenary corps, but he's still highly trained and literal-minded. When he finds his school locker has been disturbed (a girl left him a love note), he blows up the entire bank of lockers. Sousuke infiltrates a local amusement park by stealing the plush walk-around suit of the mascot Bonta-kun: The hilarious juxtaposition of martial arts violence and aggressive cuteness suggests Hello Kitty going postal. Voice actor Chris Patton makes Sousuke appealing but dense, while Luci Christian captures Kaname's understandable impatience.

Fullmetal Alchemist, Vols. 1-5 (Funimation: \$29.98 each)

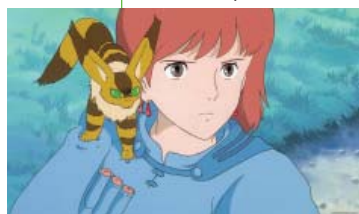
Fullmetal Alchemist blends slapstick comedy, fast-paced action and honest warmth in a way that has eluded many American animators in recent years. Although they knew they were breaking the law, Alphonse and Edward Elric used alchemy to try to bring their mother



back from the dead—and paid dearly for their transgression. Al was reduced to a disembodied soul in a suit of armor; Ed lost an arm and a leg but received “auto mail” prostheses, making him the Fullmetal Alchemist. The broad comedy and dramatic adventure sequences provide plenty of laughs and excitement but never detract from the warm, believable bond the brothers share.

Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind (Buena Vista, \$29.99)

Hayao Miyazaki's ecologically themed manga *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* (1982) brought him to widespread attention in Japan; the screen adaptation two years later helped to establish his reputation as



an important director. This post-apocalyptic fantasy foreshadows the strong heroines, thrilling flying sequences, visual imagination

and effective storytelling that would characterize his mature work. The well-acted English dub (courtesy of Patrick Stewart, Uma Thurman, Edward James Olmos and Mark Hamill, to name a few) from Disney presented the film in its entirety for the first time in America.

Paranoia Agent: Complete Collection (Geneon: \$99.98, 4

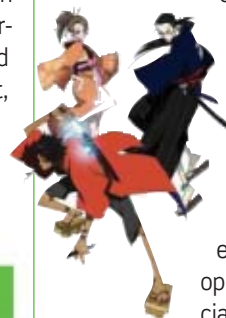
As he did in *Perfect Blue*, director Satoshi Kon blurs the boundaries between fantasy and reality. Lil' Slugger (originally *Shounen Bat*, literally “Bat Boy”), a baseball bat-wielding adolescent, attacks five people in Tokyo,

each of whom is grappling with a serious emotional problem. The attacks attract media attention, which precipitates more attacks. Lil' Slugger and the phenomenally popular toy dog Maromi gorge on media hype until they threaten to engulf Tokyo. But do either of them actually exist? Neither the audience nor the other characters really know. *Paranoia Agent* is a work of disturbing originality.



Samurai Champloo, Vols. 1-6 (Geneon: \$29.98 each)

Shinichiro Watanabe redefined cool in anime with the jazz-inflected sci-fi epic *Cowboy Bebop*. His latest series, *Samurai Champloo* mixes 19th century Japanese martial arts and 21st century American hip-hop into an off-the-wall adventure-comedy. Jin, a ronin (masterless samurai), Okinawan low-



life Mugen and nutty ex-waitress Fuu journey to Nagasaki to find a mysterious samurai “who smells of sunflowers.” Along the way, they encounter everything from oppressive government officials and a gay Dutch trader to Edo-era gang taggers, rap

lyrics, Tokugawa homeboys and an Andy Warhol caricature. Only Watanabe could carry off such cross-cultural collisions as making Mugen the first player in baseball history to pitch a no-hitter wearing *getta* (wooden platform clogs). ■

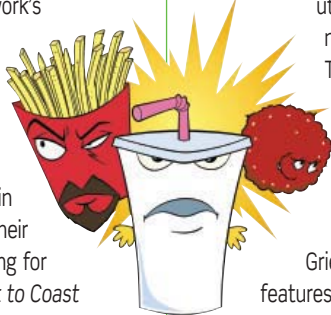
New Releases

continued from page 25

"How to Cook a Movie." It's a sure-fire way to get that bounce back in your step and stay "True to Your Groove."

Aqua Teen Hunger Force, Vol. 4
(Warner Home Video, \$29.98)
Star Wars: Clones Wars Vol. 2
(Fox Home Entertainment,
\$19.98)

Come on in, the water's warm. Grab a beer and pop *Aqua Teen Hunger Force*, Vol. 4, a fast food friendly two disc release of the remaining aired episodes from the hit Cartoon Network's [adult swim] show. *Aqua Teen Hunger Force* came from the bright minds of Matt Maiellaro and Dave Willis (Their rip-roaring tribute to tentacled hicks *Squid-billies* debuted on [adult swim] in October.), who first conjured up their happy mealers while brainstorming for an episode of *Space Ghost Coast to Coast* in 2000. With leader Master Shake, Frylock (a box of fries bearing a striking resemblance to the devil) and Meatwad, a meatball that's just gotta have mad cow flowing through it, solve myster-



Hunger Force: The Movie, which will bring deep fried entertainment to movie theatres everywhere in 2006. In the meantime, you can catch all the episodes you missed for a mere \$29.98.

Moving on to Cartoon Network's more kiddie-friendly viewing pool, Fox Home Entertainment is unleashing the force of *Star Wars: Clone Wars Vol. 2* onto DVD players, delivering five 12-minute chapters from the Emmy-winning series. Directed by Genndy Tartakovsky with art direction from Paul Rudish, *Star Wars: Clone Wars* chronicles the animated adventures of Anakin Skywalker and Obi-Wan Kenobi as they face off with General Grievous and the Separatists. Bonus features abound on this disc set: Commentary from Tartakovsky and his team of artists is available for each chapter, there are two full galleries of concept art, storyboards and sketches, and you can also check out the trailers

ies and battle the mooninites in 12-15 minute episodes. Beyond the new DVD, the gang is set to star in *Aqua Teen*

for upcoming LucasArts games, *Star Wars: Empire at War* and *Star Wars: Battlefront II*.

Santa Claus Is Comin' to Town
(Classic Media, \$16.98)

Why does Santa slide down the chimney to do his dirty work? Where did he pick up that spiffy red suit? And what's with the treat-filled stockings by the fireplace? Are these questions keeping you awake at night as you eat chocolate and tick off the days from your Advent calendar? You're not alone in your curiosity and it just so happens that the charming stop-mo classic *Santa Claus is Coming to Town* reveals everything you need to know about Kris Kringle's secret life. Rankin/Bass's delightful ode to toys which features the golden pipes of Fred Astaire and Mickey Rooney is celebrating its 35th anniversary this holiday season and Classic Media is offering a special edition DVD that comes equipped with a CD single of Mariah Carey singing the timeless title song. Catchy music, heart-warming visuals of Sombertown and Burgermeister Meisterburger make this one a perfect match for a night by the tree with a cup of cocoa. ■



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They Made It Through Another Year!

Let's hear it for the toon and vfx companies which are celebrating big anniversaries in 2006. **by Sarah Gurman and Ramin Zahed**

100 Years:

Michigan's Creative Spirit

Yowza, this year marks a whole century of churning out fine artists for Detroit's **College for Creative Studies**

COLLEGE for Creative STUDIES

(CCS). Founded by The Detroit Society of Arts and Crafts in 1906, the school's impressive list of alums includes Pixar's Jay Schuster (the creator of *Cars*), Mark Gabbana who works at Ice Blink Studios and was a concept artist on *War of the Worlds*, and Dave Hardin, an associate animator on Sony Image-works upcoming feature *Open Season*. Yes, they have one of the best automotive design programs in the world (It's Detroit!), but CCS also has a whole slew of quality programs dedicated to various visual mediums. We suggest you stop by for a visit in February, congratulate the school's President Richard L. Rogers, contribute to the anniversary celebration effort and check out AnimMo, Detroit's first animation festival.

Website: www.ccsad.edu

85 Years:

Right Brains with Staying Power

The Art Institute of Pittsburgh, which refers to itself as "The College for Creative Minds," has been molding artistic innovators for a whopping 85 years. Since Willis Shook founded the school in 1921, faculty and staff have watched students thrive in their chosen industries. At SIGGRAPH 2005 Media Arts & Animation student Jesse O'Brien was a national winner of Hewlett Packard's animation competition for his short *Open Mic Night*, and this year The Art Institute of Pittsburgh's alumni legacy will be honored at a branch of the Smithsonian for its contribution to American history through design and commercial art. These guys celebrated their 75th with a downtown street party featuring the talents of an Elvis impersonator so we can't wait to hear about how they rock out at 85.

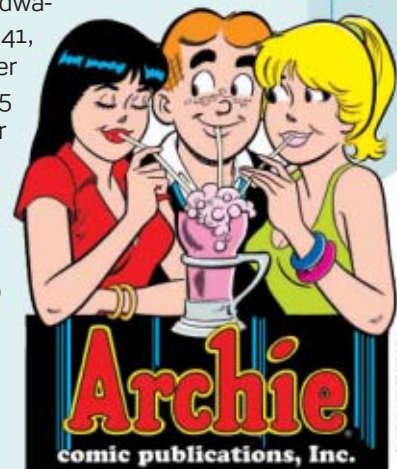
Website: www.aip.aii.edu



65 Years:

Archie Addiction

John L. Goldwater came up with Archie Andrews while looking to create a comic-book character grounded in reality who could join ranks with the super-powered kids on the block like Superman, the Sub Mariner and Wonder Woman. Louis H. Silberkleit established **Archie Comic Publications** with Goldwater in 1941, and over the past 65 years their drawn carot-top has out-sold many superhero comics combined truly embedding him in American pop culture.



The Riverdale gang has racked up some impressive achievements over the years, like having the number one TV show and a hit single (Remember "Sugar Sugar"?) at the same time, and The Bronx Zoo naming four grizzly bears Archie, Betty, Veronica and Jughead.

Now Michael Silberkleit and Richard Goldwater, sons of the founding fathers, are running the show and fans have lots to look forward to, including the catchy vocals of a new pop group The Veronicas (If you're lucky you might spot their groovy Archie bedecked tour bus.), and there's also a live-action *Betty and Veronica* movie in the works. Not surprisingly, even after all this time, the team behind Archie cites the strapping Mr. Andrews as their idol. Afterall, "The guy's biggest problem is that he can't decide between TWO incredibly hot girls."

Website: www.archiecomics.com

50 Years:

Toei Story



You can just imagine the kind of party **Toei Animation** is going to throw next October when the hugely influential Japanese studio hits the big half-century mark. Founded by Hiroshi Okawa in 1956, Toei has been a leading force in sending the popular army of Japanimation all over the world. With hits such as *Voltron*, *Dragon Ball*, *Sailor Moon*, *Digimon*, *Zatch Bell* and *One Piece*, the studio has quietly transformed the face of TV animation all over the world. The fact that anime auteurs such as Hayao Miyazaki, Isao Takahata and Yoichi Kotabe have all worked at Toei Animation at some point in their careers is another feather in the studio's cap.

Company spokesperson Kaz Yamashita says the studio is also in the process of producing live-action films which incorporate CG animation. One of these new breed of projects is the new feature *Saikano*, which will be released in theaters in Japan in January. Based on a popular manga (1999-2001) published by Big Spirit Comics, *Saikano*



Digimon

feature *Saikano*, which will be released in theaters in Japan in January. Based on a popular manga (1999-2001) published by Big Spirit Comics, *Saikano*



Dragon Ball Z

centers on a teenager who discovers that the object of his affections is actually a weapon of mass destructions created by the government!

Other highlights include *Pretty Cure*, a huge hit in Japan since its premiere in 2004. "It attracted 62.5% of the audience among girls, four to six," says Yamashita. "The licensed toys from Bandai for the property ranked number one and two in 2004. The TV series enters its third season in 2006, and we expect it to be a huge success in the U.S. and other territories as well."

Toei is also producing a cool new anime take on Craig McCracken's popular little superheroines, titled *Demashita! Powerpuff Girls Z*. Co-produced by Cartoon Network and Aniplex, the show features character design by Miho Shimogasa (*Sailor Moon*) and centers on older versions of McCracken's girls interacting with all kinds of characters and villains from Cartoon Network's other shows!

By all standards, the 50th anniversary year is going to be a very busy period for the prolific studio. As Yamashita points out, the company's in-house slogan is "Quo Toei Animation," (a riff on Quo Vadis Domine which asks where are you going?) Q for quality, U for unique properties and O for Originality!

Website: www.toei-anim.co.jp/english/index.html



35 Years:

Studio of All Trades

Disada Productions, Peter Adamakos' design-all shop situated in Ottawa, is coming up on its 35th anniversary, and the company continues as a quiet trailblazer in the industry. One of the first Canadian studios to



Winnie the Witch

tap into computer animation (These guys started swimming in the CG pool in 1983.), the Disada team has offered up their keen creative vision for film, TV, advertisements, children's books, museum exhibitions and record labels. Anything that needs design, they can do it—live action, 2D and 3D and probably whatever other dimension artists are experimenting with down the road. Best known for their loveable oddball duo, Winnie the Witch and the Giant Potato who got started as a comic strip, moved on to become a segment on *The Tree House* and then gave the book world a spin, Disada's keeping a tight lid on their upcoming projects, but we're expecting the unexpected.

Website: www.disada.com

30 Years:

Three Decades of Top Toons

What's not to like about the fantastic **Ottawa International Animation Festival**? Amazing toons, brilliant and friendly organizers, beautiful setting, a pumpkin-carving picnic. Come on, if we died and went to animation heaven, every day would feel like the Ottawa Fest. Established in 1976 by Bill Kuns, Frederik Manter, Prescott J. Wright, Frank Taylor and Kelly O'Brien, this one-of-a-kind event hits the big three-O next year. Under the leadership of managing director Kelly Neall and artistic director



Chris Robinson, Ottawa has become the kind of show we look forward to all year round.

According to Robinson, the thing nobody can guess about Ottawa is that “we are NOT, in fact, a government organization. Pulling together a five-day event IS, in fact, a full-time job—for some of us, at least!” He’s also proud that they created the world’s first international student animation festival in 1997 and Canada’s first animation-specific industry conference in 2004. The silliest thing they ever did was to “underestimate the dangers of outdated computers, which resulted in a massive office fire in 1999. We still find odd bits of charred paraphernalia here and there!” Robinson

claims that comedian Larry David (*Seinfeld*, *Curb Your Enthusiasm*) is the fest’s role model, and he says the reason they stay in business is “People keep making films and people keep wanting to see those films.” And when we ask him what’s on tap for ’06, he responds, “A retrospective of Films We Regret Rejecting.” We have no idea whether he’s joking or dead serious, and that’s why we love Ottawa so much.

Website: www.awn.com/ottawa

Hall of Fame

Manchester’s award-winning animation shop **Cosgrove Hall Films** has two big birthdays coming up: the company has reached the ripe age of 30 and its eye patch-wearing gumshoe *DangerMouse* is turning 25! Animators Brian Cosgrove and Mark Hall started their classic wielding toon studio in 1976 with a staff of seven in a converted warehouse. Over the years Cosgrove Hall programs have earned top hon-

ors across the globe, including six BAFTAs and three International Emmys, and its shows have sold to over

80 countries. Under the leadership of new managing director Anthony Utley, the talented staff works in a 25,000-square-foot custom-built studio where they produce traditional 2D, stop-motion and hand-drawn animation. After 30 years, the team still can’t get enough of this biz full of “pink dogs, blue-haired kids, secret agent mice with hamster side-kicks—the usual humdrum details of everyday life.”

As for *DangerMouse*, the very first British cartoon to be syndicated coast to coast in the U.S., he and his buddy Penfold have certainly aged gracefully. (DVD sales are healthy on Amazon.) Soon *Roger to the Rescue*, a new petite hero series will join *DangerMouse* and the other aces in Cosgrove’s catalog who are saving the world one animated episode at a time.

Website: www.chf.co.uk

25 Years:

Styling in Stockholm

The boys were still back in school in 1981, but Lars Ohlson, Stig Bergqvist and Jonas Odell managed to found the free-thinking design mecca **Film-Tecknarna**. Twenty-five years later



Revolver



the Swedish studio is producing commercials, TV series and award-winning shorts and music videos. *Revolver*, their experimental short based on repetitive movement, has received honors on the festival circuit. Recent work includes the splendid visuals in Franz Ferdinand’s “Take Me Out” video, an on-air promo for Cartoon Network and a spot for Absolut Apeach. The studio tells us that they’re working on a documentary at the moment “about the first time...” (The first time doing what? That’s for them to know and us to find out!)

Website: www.filmtecknarna.com

20 Years:

Kayenta’s Cool Quotient

Paris-based animation and post-production house **Kayenta** is known by some people in the business as the company that had a crazy idea which proved to very successful. “We came up with the silly idea to take classic Warner Bros. animated characters and make a new show out of existing programs. It was a silly idea, but 17 years later, we’re still producing them,” says company spokesperson Jackie Edwards.” The company is celebrating the 20th anniversary of its popular animation/live-action show *Ça Cartoon* in 2006. In addition to delivering



11-plus hours of packaged kids programming to half a dozen channels weekly, Kayenta produced the innovative animated series *Calamity Jane* which aired on Kids’ WB in the 1990s. Next for the company is *Frankenstein’s Cat*, a co-pro with Mackinnon & Saunders (U.K.) and *Tiny Tyrant*, based on the comic-book series *Le Roi Catastrophe* by Louis Trondheim and Fabrice Parme. Not surprisingly, they cite Chuck Jones, Bob Clampett, Tex Avery and Friz Freleng as some of their idols. “We’ve

worked with the Looney Tunes characters for many years, and they still make us laugh!"

Website: www.kayenta.com

Home of the Video Toaster and Great Pizza

Although San Antonio, Texas-based company **NewTek** will celebrate its 20th anniversary in 2006, most people will recognize the shop's revolutionary **Video Toaster**, which was the catalyst for vfx proliferation in TV programming.



Today, NewTek is one of the leading providers of full-featured video editing, live production and vfx tools including TriCaster, VT[4]

and LightWave 3D. Recent projects using NewTek tools include *Battlestar Galactica*, *Children of Dune* and *The Final Cut*. Founded by Tim Jenison, the company is currently led by president and CEO Jim Plant. They say they stay in business "to empower clients with big ideas to achieve their goals no matter what their budgets are. You don't have to have deep pockets to be a NewTek customer." And a couple of things NewTek's Chuck Baker wants us to know: "Think big...and don't step in that stuff on the floor right there. No, the green stuff you don't have to worry about, it's the orange stuff you need to avoid. It eats your shoes and just sorta keeps right on going! Actually, even if you take them off. We haven't figured out how it does that yet!" They also seem to take to heart this piece of wisdom: "Great technologies start with great pizza...and great Chinese takeout...and great Tex-Mex doesn't hurt either. And really big sloppy burgers occasionally!"

Website: www.newtek.com



15 Years:

Discreet Flashback

Aaaah, good old 1991: R.E.M.'s "Losing My Religion" was the biggest hit on the radio, *Roseanne* and *Murphy Brown* ruled the TV airwaves and Disney's *Beauty and the Beast* was the first animated movie to be nominated for a Best Picture Oscar. That was also the year in which forward-thinking Richard Szalwinski established **Discreet Logic** in Montreal. DL, which was acquired by Autodesk in 1999, developed some of the real-time special effects software that were used in producing landmark movies such as *Titanic*, *Jurassic Park*, *Independence Day* and *The Fifth Element*. Today, Autodesk



flame®



Media & Entertainment continues to set the industry standard with products such as Flame, Inferno, Smoke and 3ds Max.

When we asked the folks at Autodesk to tell us the least-known info byte about their company, they said, "Nobody can guess that our products created the famous dancing baby on *Ally McBeal*!" And they also point to their CEO Carol Bartz as their role model: "She has been at the helm of the company for 15 years and was instrumental in transforming Autodesk into a diversified software company!"

The year ahead will see the company complete the acquisition of Alias and fine-tune Toxik, the new collab-

orative software for feature film vfx. So what was the best thing they ever did? "We diversified into many markets that require creative 2D and 3D software and systems!" Darn it, don't we all wish we were that smart!?

Website: www.autodesk.com

A Walk in the Anime Park

When Masumi Homma and John O'Donnell set up **Central Park Media Corporation** in 1990, few would have guessed that their company would someday be responsible for *MD Geist Death Force*, the first anime OVA co-produced between the U.S. and Japan, and one of the first two anime titles to appear on the Billboard video sales chart (*Ghost in*



MD Geist
Death Force

the Shell was the other title). That's why the Central Park crew is living it up in 2006, which marks the 15th anniversary of its first Japanese anime releases in 1991: *Project A-ko*, *Dominion Tank Police* and *MD Geist*.

The New York-based anime authority that brought us classics such as *Doggy Poo* and *Legend of the Overfiend* is getting set for the release of the 20th Anniversary Collector's Series DVD of *Armored Trooper Votoms*. This must-own item will feature all four digipak releases with 52 episodes, a 64-page program guide and a limited-edition metal Votoms Ammo Can. The Central Park team says they stay in this business because "We like what we do, and we enjoy watching our own releases." Hear, Hear!

Website: www.centralparkmedia.com

SPECIAL SECTION

VFX Down Under

In 1991 Zareh Nalbandian and Chris

Godfrey established **Animal Logic**, an Aussie all-star of digital production with



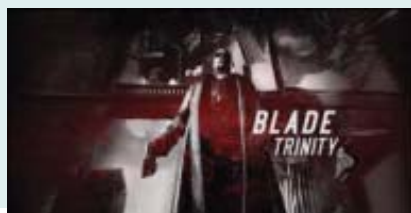
a knack for crafting visual effects on commercials and TV series. The creative house added a design and interactive arm to the roster in 2000, accommodating new technology and media with its expanded capabilities for visual invention that we have come to know and love. Recently, the AWARD (Australian Writers and Art Directors Assoc.) Awards honored Animal Logic with two Silver Pencils for their digital design and special effects work on the Carlton Draught spot *Big Ad*, and a Bronze Pencil for the CG moves they created in *Knives for Toyota Camry*. And now, in the midst of celebrating 15 years of digital excellence, the vfx movers and shakers are hard at work on Warner Bros.' Nov. 2006 release, the CG-animated *Happy Feet*, a tap dancing penguin extravaganza directed by George Miller (*Babe*, *Mad Max*) with avian voices courtesy of Nicole Kidman, Hugh Jackman and Brittany Murphy. Pass the vegemite and keep your eyes peeled for Animal Logic's spin on good clean digital penguin fun.

Website: www.animallogic.com

10 Years:

Creativity Overdrive at Imaginary Forces

It's been quite a decade for entertainment and design agency **Imagi-**

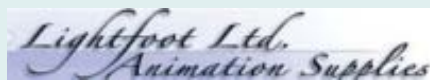


nary Forces. Established on Halloween of 1996 by Chip Houghton, Peter Frankfurt and Kyle Cooper, the company has based on a myriad of projects from feature-film production and marketing to corporate branding, architecture, commercials and interactive media. IF has produced main titles and marketing campaigns for such feature films as *Ray*, *Spider-Man*, *Seven*, *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* and *The Chronicles of Narnia*. The company even produced the third installment of the *Blade* series, *Trinity*, and will get into making original shorts in '06. So what is the one thing that people can't guess about them? "We still use pencils!" they respond coyly. They also tell us that the silliest thing they did was produce safety videos. "We had monthly safety tips reminding employees about the perils of the workplace; i.e., beware of the toaster oven, apply sunscreen, don't reach for the top shelf while standing on a chair with wheels, etc!" With that kind of creativity at work, we can only give 'em a big high five and wish them more amazing projects for their next decade of greatness.

Website: www.imaginaryforces.com

Toon Tools For the Masses

Nataha and Seomii Lightfoot of the 10-year-old **Lightfoot company** love sharing the power of a visual language



with those who want to have a voice in visual communication. Based in Temecula, Calif., their outfit has created the Round Hole Pegbar, 10f paper and the Mini Pencil Tester, tools that have helped students and teachers at numerous animation schools and studios. "We have had a major impact in the world of animation by the products that we have been able to create on a limited budget. We look for need and produce the obvi-



ous," says president Nataha Lightfoot. "We've seen what animation can do for those nobody believes in, and have trained students to become employed in the industry... we look for the courageous and offer them hope through the tools and training we provide."

Website: www.lightfootltd.com

Ryan's Kids

Canada's Seneca College might have been one of the best-kept secrets in the animation industry, but after Chris Landreth's brilliant CG-animated short *Ryan* won the Oscar last year, many learned that a group of students from Seneca helped Landreth realize his vision. Formerly known as the Digital Media Center, **Seneca College Animation Arts Center** will celebrate its 10th anniversary this year. The first class of the new three-year animation arts diploma program will graduate in June. Our best wishes go to these pioneering grads and president Rick Miner, chair Jed DeCory, Animation Arts Center program coordinator JoAnn Purcell and the rest of the enterprising team.



Ryan

Website: www.seneca.on.ca

Houdini's Favorite Act

It's hard to believe that it's been 10 years since **Side Effects Software** introduced the vfx world to its two-time Oscar-winning **Houdini**. Company founders Kim Davidson and Greg Hermanovic were also behind the revolutionary PRISMS, which was used 20 years ago in Disney's *Flight of the Navigator*. Houdini's next big project is Disney's *The Wild*, which features work by C.O.R.E. "We love



what we do, and we love to see what our customers will create next with Houdini," says CEO Davidson. Chances are a lot of movie fans out there will also keep their eyes peeled for more awe-inspiring Houdini tricks.

Website: www.sidefx.com

Sinking Their Teeth into Quality

Established in July of 1996 by Mataichiro Yamamoto, **Urban Vision Entertainment** played a big role in exposing a larger segment of the movie-going audience to anime when it



Vampire Hunter
D: Bloodlust

released the acclaimed film, *Vampire Hunter D: Bloodlust* in U.S. theaters

five years ago. "Anime had long held an appeal mostly to a niche audience, but the theatrical release of *Vampire Hunter D: Bloodlust* was the most successful theatrical run of an anime title at that time, which elevated the genre to another level," says company spokesperson Robyn Mukai.

Under the leadership of current president Sandee Yamamoto, Urban Vision Entertainment also released the complete set of *Ninja Scroll: The Series* in 2005 and is now branching out into segments of the entertainment field, including Latin and Asian live-action movies. "But our roots are in anime," Mukai assures us. "That's what we believe in! Our motto is use your resources to make something good even better!" Here's to more decades of quality toons from the L.A.-based distrib and production powerhouse.

Website: www.urban-vision.com



Ninja Scroll:
The Series

Raising Arizona

Since its original class of 45 students in 1996, **The Art Institute of Phoenix** grew to have a class of over 1,200 creative brains in 2003. This year



the school will be celebrating a decade of producing skilled graduates more than ready to hang in there with the pros. In the past undergrads and alums have been afforded unique opportunities, like the chance to work on the animation in Don Bluth's *Titan A.E.* and design for NASA's ASPIRE public service announcement, and now this branch of the Art Institute is gearing up for a special showcase at the Phoenix Film Festival. With President Karen A. Bryant leading the way, faculty and students do their best to adhere to the school's motto, "Create Yourself Here."

Website: www.aipx.edu

Stop-Mo Staple

For the past 10 years Munich-based **Boinx Software** has concocted nifty apps like FotoMagico, Miracle Sight and, of course, iStopMotion that industry pros and casual users alike have come to rely on. The user-friendly extraordinaires have the in-house and out-house slogan "Enjoy your life!" and they create accessible and practical tools allowing artists to do just that. Right now founders Oliver and Achim Breidenbach and



the rest of the Boinx team (They don't actually know what "Boinx" means but they like the sound of it!) are working on a new and improved version of their helmer software, iStopMotion 2. An anniversary celebration and a new app to make time-lapse frames really boogie? Looks like Boinx is set for smooth sailing in 2006.

Website: www.boinx.com

Canadian Gem

Lee Williams and Debra Wynter set up their kid-loving toon house **Boomstone Entertainment** in December 1996. The friendly gang behind the Ottawa native production studio takes time out between contracts to teach animation to children, and these tots often serve as in-house focus groups for all of their



Little Melody



developing projects. Spending time with the little ones keeps these guys

optimistic and silly. You can see the passion and enthusiasm for animation that has kept Boomstone chugging for the last decade in quirky projects like *MothMan* and *Little Melody*. Williams notes, "We love to draw ... even if we're producing Flash!"

Website: www.boomstone.com

Digitally Effective

The clever folks over at Austin's **DigiEffects** have been creating indispensable tools for vfx carpenters throughout the industry for the past ten years. CineLook, their flagship product, allows users to add grain, correct color and change the frame rate on their video projects to make them appear more like films. The company recently released CineLook 2, featuring a new custom user interface that gives the visual effects editor greater control and speeds up the design process, and now they're finishing up on the Windows version to complete their product line. With leaders like JoAnne Milette and Kendall Anders, we're sure



the Texan team will deliver many more handy digital solutions in the next decade.

Website: www.digieffects.com

Made in India



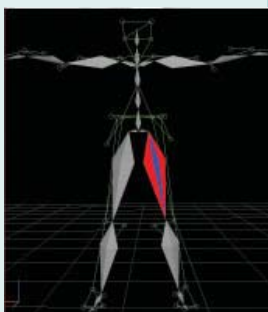
DQEntertainment's (DQE) founder Tapaas Chakravarti and his toon connoisseur squad have a

lot to smile about as they celebrate the company's 10th year. In addition to the award-winning properties they have under their belt like *Delta State* and *bro'Town*, the Hyderabad, India-based animation house has production cooking on a variety of fab 2D and 3D shows, including *Skyland*, *Pet Pals*, *Tutenstein* and *Jet Groove*. Recently DQE was named one of the top 100 private companies advancing technology in Asia by *Red Herring*, and it's not hard to see why as currently Chakravarti is helming a huge pool of talent (estimated manpower is over 2,500) with a rendering capacity exceeding 600 minutes per month—phew! The rapidly developing prod shop points to Walt Disney as their role model. We're sure that this reverence for the classics is a key ingredient in their continued success.

Website: www.dataquestinfoway.com

A Decade of Mo-Cap Magic

They pick James Cameron as their biggest idol because he was the first person to really push the use of mo-cap CG extras for his blockbuster movie, *Titanic*. It's easy to see why. When c o m p a n y founder Tom Tolles founded **House of Moves** in 1996, few could predict what glorious visual heights we would see



in the mo-cap world in 10 years. Tolles, president and CEO, bought one of the first Vicon motion capture systems to be used in the business back when it was considered a fledgling technology for filmmakers and gamers. Exec producer Scott Gagain points out, "Both *Titanic* and *Spider-Man 2* are our most high-profile projects to date, but we're also well known for developing Diva motion-capture editing software. We've worked on over 300 game projects and have had personalities ranging from James Brown to Andre Agassi suited up on our stages." What to expect next from this forward-looking studio? "Wish we could talk about it," teases Gagain, "But doing mo-cap of one of the most popular bands in the world was pretty awesome! We've also completed capture for an upcoming National Geo special, titled *Fight Science*, and a number of feature film projects that will be released in 2006." Happy anniversary, you brilliant, tight-lipped people!

Website: www.houseofmoves.com

Flushing With Pride



Every year, as we compile our anniversary list, we come up with certain entries

that make us question the authenticity of the provided information. We have our doubts about Alan D. Makowski and Nick Leon and the 10-year-anniversary of their production company **Screaming Wedgie Entertainment**, but we like their unbridled enthusiasm and the name of their project, *Flush Gordon and The Unflushables*. Makowski and Leon claim that their toon will be hailed as the most outrageous and funniest cartoon maybe ever produced! "We've put ten years of thought and patience into making it the next *Simpsons*!" Well, congratulations, fellows. Maybe a good-hearted soul will help you celebrate your anniversary by bankrolling your toon!

Website: www.screamingwedgie.com

An Eye for the Good Life

After a decade of watching **eyeon Software Inc.** grow as a leading developer of digital tools we were itching to find out the company's secret. We did a bit of recon and were able to uncover some crucial information: 1. These guys like to play. Their tradeshow survey concludes with the question, "What's

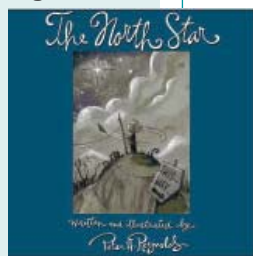


your favorite beer?" If you guess the right beer you can score a free copy of Fusion! 2. The eyeon staff maintains a close relationship with the animal kingdom, pointing to Wallace and Gromit as their biggest role models. Public relations director Michelle Dobransky notes, "See, our office is a zoo. We usually have three dogs in-house, Gromit, Jersey and Riley. Wallace the cat gets to stay at home. Cats—they have it so easy." 3. This office has unique and personal perspective on the world. Their in-house slogan: "Gooooood chicken." From this information and our knowledge of eyeon's vfx champion, Fusion (recent version, Fusion 5), we can conclude that this team is just plain good at what it does and they enjoy doing it, bringing a little fun to the table whenever possible.

Website: www.eyeonline.com

Success Story

The dedicated thinkers at **FableVision** are constantly looking for new ways to help kids learn. Founder Peter H. Reynolds and his twin brother Paul Reynolds started their enterprise in 1996, committed to delivering "Stories that matter, stories that move." And Paul



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and Peter's stories have taken all shapes and sizes as FableVision serves up books, video and other pieces of imaginative merchandise for young minds to chew on. Projects like the animated co-production of Peter's book *ISH* and the launch of *The North Star* film with a cross media licensing initiative are keeping the team's nose to the grindstone. We suggest you visit their entertaining website which is chock full of brain-tickling tales and games.

Website: www.fablevision.com

Indie Flair

Still small and still independent, **Fowler Cartooning Ink** takes pride in every project it works on. Mike S. Fowler established his cartoon haven 10 years ago, and the Canada native currently has production partners in England, Germany, Italy and India. Fowler's *Animation Background Layout: From Student to Professional*, a handy guide that explains the logistics and reasoning behind different techniques has been a great international success for the company; an expanded edition is set to hit the market in 2006. The skilled crew just wrapped up production on their short, *The Picture*, which will begin making festival rounds in '06, and they also have a mind-bending children's book in the works that teaches readers a new language.

Website: www3.sympatico.ca/mike.fowler

Five Years:

God's in Their Details

Five years ago, Tony Bancroft, Ben Chambers and Bo Ferger joined forces to launch a new animation company in Burbank called **Toonacious Fam-**



ily Entertainment. Since then, they've worked on various projects, including *Lenny & Sid*, *The Origin of Stitch* and *The Tinkerbell Movie*. The company is dedicated to "entertaining, educating and elevating the hearts and minds of children with products that kids will love and parents can trust." In 2006, they'll be working on various animated features, including *The Treasure of Calico Jack*, *Bigfoot Murray* and *Marco Polo*. The team says they stay in the business because they're on a mission from God. When we asked them to tell us something nobody would guess about them, they replied, "We really do know what we're doing and we're actually pretty good at it—humbly speaking of course! Also, as crazy as it sounds, we hang out together outside of the office too." Now how can you not love these guys?

Website: www.toonacious.com

Poetry in NaturalMotion

Five years ago, Torsten Riel and Colm Massey's company, **NaturalMotion**, introduced a very useful software called **endorphin**. This dynamic motion-synthesis software offers adaptive behaviors, 3D characters that essentially animate themselves. Endorphin allows animators to direct scenes in real time and see the results right up on the screens. When we asked Torsten to tell us something people don't know about his company, he says, "We nearly called ourselves Neuroforce as some of our British investors thought NaturalMotion sounded too much like a lax-

ative." He also says the best thing he ever did was talk to animators before he started developing endorphin. He has several hush-hush projects in the



works, but if he told us about them, he'd have to destroy each copy of the magazine by hand.

Website: www.naturalmotion.com

Big Easy Champs

Yes, they're based in New Orleans, and, yes, they survived the wrath of Hurricane Katrina. So, they deserve a big hug for that accomplishment alone. However, **Turbo Squid** founders Andrew and Matthew Wisdom will also celebrate their fifth anniversary in '06. According to marketing manager Alex Frost, TS is most famous for creating the 3D model online-marketplace, as well as having the world's largest library of 3D models on the plan-

et! "The best thing we ever did was expand our product lines beyond 3D models and textures to include software and training materials, so that our offerings encompass the entire suite of services for the 3D world," Frost says. On tap for the new year: expanding the Turbo Training line, introducing Hairtrix to the 3D community and increasing involvement with Maya content. We wish them the very best and know they'll be an active force in the re-emergence of

New Orleans as a vibrant city.

Website: www.turbosquid.com ■



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Milestones in Toon Town: 2006 Edition

100 years ago:

James Stuart Blackton makes the three-minute-long **Humorous Phases of Funny Faces**, one of the first examples of animation (filmed at 20 frames per second).

Humorous Phases of Funny Faces



95 years ago:



Little Nemo

Winsor McCay animates a brief adaptation of the **Little Nemo** comic-strip.



Mutt and Jeff

90 years ago:

George Herriman's **Krazy Kat** strip inspires animated shorts by Hearst Intl. and Bray Studios.



Krazy Kat

Meanwhile, Fisher's strip **Mutt and Jeff** is also adapted into toons by Charles Bowers.

85 years ago:

Max Fleischer sets up his own studio with **Koko** as its star animated character.



80 years ago:

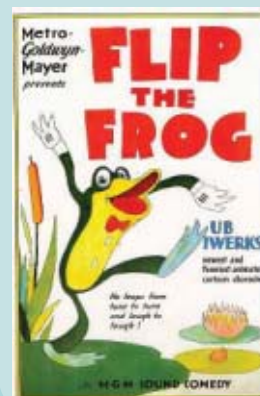
Lotte Reiniger's (shadow-puppet) animated **The Adventures of Prince Achmed** is considered the first



The Adventures of Prince Achmed

feature-length animated release. Kodak produces the first 16 mm film.

75 years ago:



Ub Iwerks launches his own studio, showcasing **Flip the Frog**. Disney releases the influential and Oscar-winning short **Flowers and Trees**.



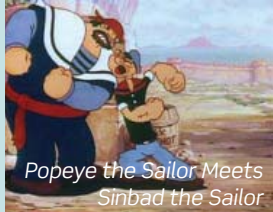
Flowers and Trees

70 years ago:

David Hand and Wilfred Jackson's **Country Cousin** wins the Best Animated Short Oscar for Disney Studios. **Tex Avery** works on **Gold Diggers of '49** for Warner Bros. Music maestro **Carl Stalling** also joins Warner Bros. **Max Fleischer**



Country Cousin

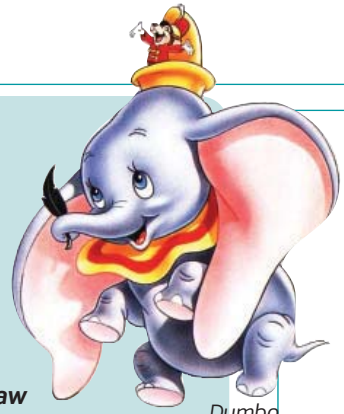


Popeye the Sailor Meets Sinbad the Sailor

delivers **Popeye the Sailor Meets Sinbad the Sailor**, shot on a horizontal rig with 3D backgrounds and characters animated on glass in the front.

65 years ago:

Directed by Ben Sharpsteen, **Dumbo** is released on Oct. 23, 1941. The 64-minute pic wins the Oscar for Best Music and is nominated for Best Song (*Baby Mine*). Clyde Geronimi's **Lend a Paw** (starring Pluto) wins the Oscar for Best Animated Short. Things are hopping at Fleischer as well as the studio delivers **Superman** and **Hoppity Goes to Town**.



Dumbo



Hoppity Goes to Town

60 years ago:

UPA's **Mr. Magoo's Puddle Jumper** wins the Oscar for Best Animated Short. **John Hubley** and **Faith Elliot** start **Storyboard Productions**. Other highlights include the



Peter and the Wolf

The Cat Concerto, **Acrobatty Bunny**, **Daffy**

Doodles, **Donald's Double Trouble**, **Hair-Raising Hare**, **Peter and the Wolf**, **Song of the South** and **The Tortoise Wins Again**. **Foghorn Leghorn** makes his first appearance in **Walky Talky Hawk**.

55 years ago:

Lewis Carroll's beloved classic comes to animated



Alice in Wonderland

life in **Alice in Wonderland**, directed by the Geronimi/Luske/Jackson team. Among the hilarious shorts of the year are **Big Top Bunny**, **Cat-Choo**, **Droopy's**

Double Trouble, **A Fox in a Fix**, **His Mouse Friday**, **Lovelorn Leghorn** and **Papa's Day of Rest**.

45 years ago:

Osamu Tezuka's hugely popular and influential **Astro Boy** comes to the U.S. The year also marks the "official" reign of the **Nine**



101 Dalmatians

Old Men at Disney. Cruella De Vil, Pongo and Perdita star in Disney's popular **101 Dalmatians**, which marks the first use of Xerox cels in an animated feature. Directed by Wolfgang Reitherman, Hamilton Luske and Clyde Geronimi, the film cost \$4 million to make. This is also the year **The Yogi Bear Show**, **The Bullwinkle Show**, **Calvin and the Colonel**, **The Dick Tracy Show**, **Top**

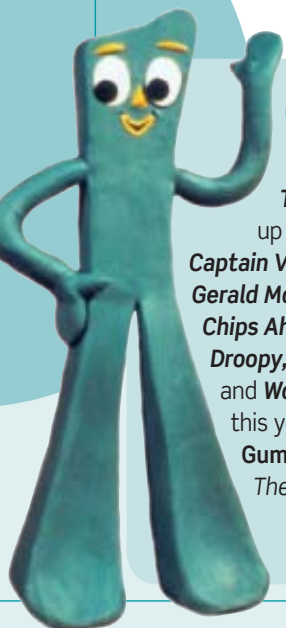
Cat and **The Alvin Show** premiere on TV. **John Hubley** creates the Oscar-winning short, **Moonbird**.

Yogi Bear



50 years ago:

The Heckle and Jeckle Show pops up on TV as do **CBS Cartoon Theater**, **Captain Video and His Cartoon Rangers**, **The Gerald McBoing-Boing Show** and **Popeye**. **Chips Ahoy**, **The Egg and Jerry**, **Millionaire Droopy**, **Tweet and Sour**, **Wideo Wabbit** and **Woodpecker from Mars** are some of this year's theatrical shorts. Art Clokey's **Gumby** makes his first appearance on **The Howdy Doody Show**.



Gumby

www.animationmagazine.net

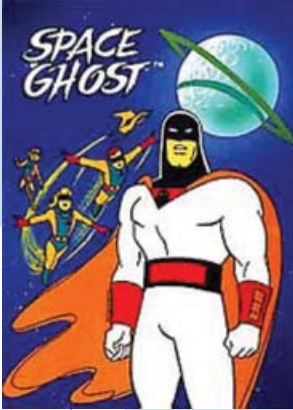
ANIMATION MAGAZINE

January 2006 39

SPECIAL SECTION

40 years ago:

Tezuka's *Kimba the Lion*



debuts on U.S. television. The first Peanuts special, *It's the Great Pumpkin, Charlie Brown* premieres on TV. The holidays also bring TV viewers *Dr. Seuss' How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, directed by Chuck Jones. In theaters, fans can catch *Winnie the Pooh and the Honey Tree* and *The Man Called Flintstone*. Other toons premiering on TV this year are *Captain America*, *Cool McCool*, *Hulk*, *King Kong*, *The Mighty Thor*, *the Road Runner Show*, *Space Ghost* and *The New Adventures of Superman*.



35 years ago:

Ralph Bakshi's *Fritz the Cat* becomes the first X-rated animated feature in the U.S. The great animator *Ub Iwerks* passes away. TV viewers tune in to *Here Comes Peter Cottontail*,



The Cat in the Hat, *The Jackson Five*, *Archie's TV Funnies*, *Lippy the Lion* and *The Pebbles and Bamm-Bamm Show*. Narrated by Dustin Hoffman, *Fred Wolf's The Point* is one of the first one-hour animated specials on TV. Also in theaters this year are *Bedknobs and Broomsticks*, *Bongo*, *A Christmas Carol* and *How to Trap a Woodpecker*.

30 years ago:



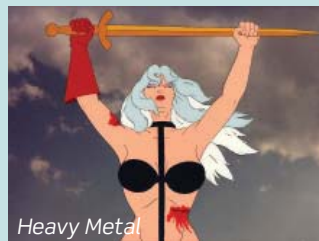
Not a huge year for TV toons since the big titles are shows such as *The Flumps*, *Jabberjaw*, *The Scooby-Doo/Dynomutt Hour* and *Tarzan, Lord of the Jungle*. On the movie front, we have *Donald Duck's Fun*

Festival, *The Smurfs and the Magic Flute*, *The Adventures of Asterix* and *Bugs Bunny Superstar*. Popular German character *Maya the Bee* makes its debut.



25 years ago:

Disney's lushly animated *The Fox and the Hound* is released in theaters in July, 1981. Also on the big screen this year are *American Pop*,



Heavy Metal, *The Looney, Looney, Looney Bugs Bunny Movie* and *The Misadventures of Chip and Dale*. TV audiences tune in to *The Pied Piper of Hamelin*, *Danger Mouse*, *Postman Pat*, *Richie Rich*, *The Smurfs* and *Spider-Man*.



20 years ago:



Don Bluth gives Disney a run for its money with his lushly animated feature, *An American Tail*. Other big screen toons include *The Great Mouse Detective*, *Asterix in Britain*, *Care Bear Movies II*, *My Little Pony: The Movie*, *Castle in the Sky* and the famous John Lasseter short, *Luxo Jr.* Among the shows premiering on TV this year are *The Bugs Bunny and Tweety Show*, *Dennis the Menace*, *Dragon Ball*, *Ghostbusters*, *Mobile Suit Gundam ZZ*, *My Little Pony and Friends* and *Silverhawks*. Jim Henson Company produces the dazzling *Labyrinth* movie.



15 years ago:

Disney's ***Beauty and the Beast*** is the first animated feature to be nominated



Beauty and the Beast

for the Best Picture Oscar. **Daniel Greaves' *Manipulation*** is the Oscar-winner for Best Animated Short. TV viewers are introduced to ***Liquid Television***, ***The Ren and Stimpy Show***, ***Rugrats***, ***Space Cats***, ***Where's Waldo?***, ***Doug*** and ***Darkwing Duck***. Long-form trailblazers include ***American Tail: Feivel Goes West*** and ***Spike & Mike's Festival of Animation, Vol. 1***. Holiday specials include ***Winnie the Pooh & Christmas Too*** and ***Berke Breathed's A Wish for Wings That Work***. Hanna-Barbera is bought by Turner Broadcasting.



Doug

5 years ago:

Ralph Eggleston's Pixar project ***For the Birds*** wins the Oscar for Best



Shrek

Animated Short.

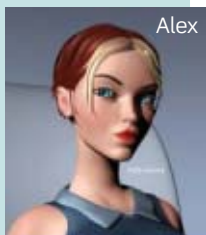
Among the numerous

animated shows premiering on TV this year are ***Angelina Ballerina***, ***Braceface***, ***The Cramp Twins***, ***The Fairly OddParents***, ***The Grim Adventures of Billy & Mandy***, ***Invader ZIM***, ***Gary & Mike***, ***Lloyd in Space***, ***Max Steel***, ***The Oblongs***, ***Oswald***, ***The Proud Family***, ***The Ripping Friends***, ***Samurai Jack***, ***Super Duper Sumos***, ***Sagwa the Chinese Siamese Cat***, ***Totally Spies!*** and

Tabaluga. 4Kids offers ***Yu-Gi-Oh!*** to U.S. viewers. 2001 was also a rich year for the big screen as ***Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within***, ***Jimmy Neutron: Boy Genius***, ***Monkeybone***, ***Mutant Aliens*** and ***Waking Life*** are released in theaters. Hayao Miyazaki's ***Spirited Away*** sets box-office records in Japan. DreamWorks Animation's CG-animated ***Shrek*** is a big draw at the box-office and goes on to win the Oscar for Best Animated Feature in 2002. ***Luminetik*** creates a sexy, realistic-looking CG heroine named ***Alex***.

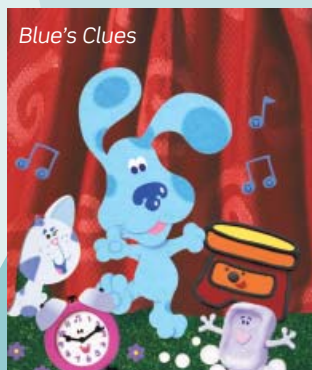


For the Birds



Alex

10 years ago:

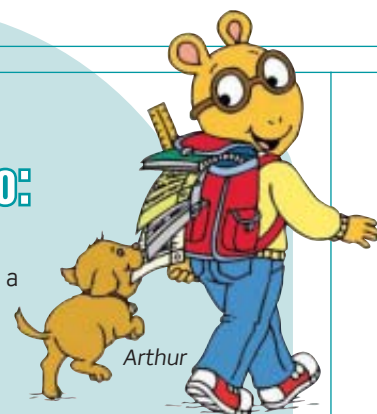


Blue's Clues

1996 was a boom year for animated shows on

TV: Highlights included ***Arthur***, ***Beast Wars***, ***Transformers***, ***Blue's Clues***, ***Disney's Doug***, ***Dexter's Laboratory***, ***Dragon Ball GT***, ***Hey Arnold***, ***Kablam!*** and ***Superman: The Animated Series***. Not a bad year for

theatrical releases either as Disney's ***The Hunchback of Notre Dame***, ***James and the Giant Peach***, ***Space Jam*** and Aardman Animation's ***Walt's Pig*** make it to the big screen.



Arthur



James and the Giant Peach

Power Players

2006 also marks some big milestones for the people behind the toons and technology that make us swoon.

- **Mark Simon**, the proud award-winning father of ***Timmy's Lessons in Nature***, took the plunge into the entertainment industry in 1986, and that same year licensing guru Hanny Brands joined the Telescreen team.
- Animation art conservation expert **Ron Barbagallo** became a member of our very own eccentric ***Animation Magazine*** family ten years ago. Congrats, Ron!
- In 2001 TV-Loonland got an animated boost when current CEO **Selma Kappel** hopped on board.

SPECIAL SECTION



Blue-Screening the Rain Forest Critters

PBS's *It's a Big Big World* offers a smooth blend of puppetry, animatronics and CG wizardry. **by Ramin Zahed**

These aren't your father's fuzzy puppets. That may be the first impression you get when you tune in to *It's a Big Big World*, the new series premiering on PBS Kids this January. Using an impressive mélange of traditional puppetry, animatronics and CG animation, the show centers on a lovable giant sloth named Snook and his friends in the rain forest, which include two rambunctious marmoset siblings, a singing tree frog, an ancient sea turtle, an overwhelmed anteater and an old monkey trickster. If Snook and company remind you of the huggable characters on Disney Channel's preschool hit, *Bear in the Big Blue*

House, it's not a coincidence. Both shows are the brainchild of award-winning creator Mitchell Kriegman, whose numerous credits also include

Book of Pooh, *Ren and Stimpy*, *Doug*, *Rugrats*, *Clarissa Explains It All* and (yup!) *Saturday Night Live*.

"I wanted to create a show that taught kids about geography and science but



also made them feel better about the world we live in," says Kriegman. "Children today are affected by the global community more than ever before, and

I wanted to offer parents and kids a natural, positive way to think and talk about the world around them. I try to create shows specifically targeting the networks and this one really fit with the mandate of PBS Kids."

Kriegman began work on the project about three years ago. He knew from the beginning that one of his central characters was going to be a sloth. "Kids often see grownups as these giant waffling characters, and that's how they're going to see Snook. He's this warm, energetic creature who also likes taking naps."

The striking high-def look of the show is certainly one of its strongest points. Using renowned puppeteers from *Avenue Q*, *Sesame Street* and *Blue's Clues*, the preschool series is also one of the pioneering showcases of a process called Shadowmation. This patented process uses real-time virtual sets and bun raku style-team puppetry and integrates live-action animatronic characters and CG animation in real-time, high-def virtual environments.

"We shoot in a blue-screen environment and the results have a distinctive, immersive quality," explains Kriegman. "It's similar to how some anchors deliver the news in virtual sets. We use everything from Shake and Fusion to Maya and Photoshop. We create the backgrounds in Maya, and then we integrate the CG-animation with puppetry. First, you build the puppets [eight major characters], then you render the backgrounds and then you put it all together. The end result is that you have an environment where you feel as if these puppets are interacting together in the rain forest."

Regardless of the amazing new technology, the show's bigger selling point may be its heartwarming puppet stars. "I personally love Snook because he's a very warm and lovable creature," says Kriegman. "I don't think viewers have seen characters like these in such a remarkable world. And the show taps into a child's natural fascination with the world in a playful, yet scientific way." ■

***It's a Big Big World* premieres on PBS Kids on January 2.**



Mitchell Kriegman

Bladder Lad and
Plunger Pete

Sparks Fly at Porchlight

A LeapFrog co-venture is only one of many high-profile projects plugged in at L.A.-based Porchlight Entertainment.

by Ramin Zahed

Many animation producers would consider embarking on a joint venture with LeapFrog Enterprises similar to landing a winning lottery ticket. After all, the Emeryville, Calif.-based outfit is one of the most trusted and recognized brands in the toy industry by both parents and teachers. That's why the good folks at Porchlight have one more reason to celebrate this holiday season since they recently announced a partnership with LeapFrog.

The Los Angeles-based company began its foray into animation a decade ago with the PBS shows *Adventures from the Book of Virtues*, and it has been a familiar face in kids' entertainment ever since. "One of the things that we've done from the very beginning is to focus on the kids and family market," says Porchlight's president and CEO Bruce Johnson. "That's why we're extremely excited about this opportunity to combine LeapFrog's content with our expertise in creating entertainment and educational animated shows."

This is not the first time Porchlight and LeapFrog have embarked on a joint venture. The two companies

collaborated on a series of five DVDs in the past few years. However, the new venture marks a new and much bigger chapter.

"This will be substantially different from anything that we've done," adds Johnson. "We're planning on how to take their content and apply it to television. Everything they do is based on a curriculum. All their products are heavily tested with numerous educational consultants. That's why there is such a strong trust factor with moms, caregivers and educators."

Johnson believes that he and his team will have something to show buyers in the first quarter of 2006. He also points out that the Porchlight team will emphasize LeapFrog's trademark of helping kids learn on their own.

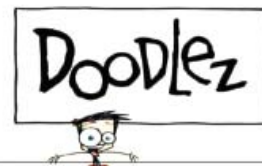
LeapFrog will certainly have good company on the Porchlight slate in '06. The company's well-known properties *Jay Jay the Jet Plane* and *Tutenstein* both have new episodes on the way. In the series *Jay Jay's Mysteries*, which launched on PBS in mid-October, kids met a new Spanish-speaking plane name Lina who helps both Jay Jay and the kids at home solve gentle mysteries about the world around us. A new 13-episode season of the Emmy-winning *Tutenstein*—co-produced with Discovery Kids, Ireland's Telegael Teoranta and India's DQ Entertainment is also on the way in spring.

"One of our challenges in the coming year is to continue growing and building as we've done over the

past ten years," says Johnson. "We will take advantage of new technologies to look for and find innovative styles for producing our shows. We are also looking at what's happening in the mobile field and finding opportunities for our new programs as well as material from our library," he adds.

Fans of innovative animated TV content can look forward to several new Porchlight shows. Aiming for a 2007 debut is *Bladder Lad and Plunger Pete*, a high-energy, edgy show aimed at boys aged nine to 13. Exec produced by animation veteran Fred Schaefer, the toon centers on two dedicated heroes who work for F.L.U.S.H., a secret government agency sworn to protect the world from the villainy of D.R.A.I.N.! In development with Jetix Europe, the show was created by Darryl Kluskowski. Schaefer is also overseeing a new direct-to-video special titled *A Martian Christmas* which will be out in 2007.

Doodlez is another one of the company's innovative shows in the mix. Created by Cellar Door Productions', Sean Scott, Campbell MacKinley and Rodney King, this 2D series is all about DOOD, a simple hero drawn by a powerful animator known as HAND! Porchlight sells the show internationally, but is also developing a new version with longer episodes.

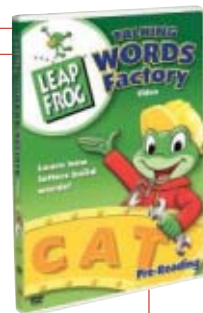


Johnson says they also got a very good reception for *The Eggs*, a distribution property they

shopped at the MIPCOM market this year. Produced by Funbag Animation and B&T Entertainment, this traditionally animated series follows the adventures of Benedict, Sunnyside, Yolk and Scramble, who live on Planet Kazoo and have a good ear for intergalactic music.

"When you visit some of these markets, you realize that there's certainly a lot of content out there," notes Johnson. "But despite the quantity, we've found out that there are very few programs that manage to shine. It takes a lot of skill and talent and luck to have something pop out. Hopefully, what we deliver is going to be stand out in the field and be exceptional. ■

For more information, visit www.porchlight.com



TELEVISION



The Eggs



Bruce Johnson



Fred Schaefer

The Padded Cel

Uncle Walt Turns Over in His Cryogenic Unit



by Robby London

In the next few weeks, you will be able to pick up a new book in stores titled *Walt Disney: Conversations*. Presumably these are *old* conversations. Wouldn't you love to hear what Walt would say *today*? Of course everyone "knows" he had himself cryogenically frozen in the secret tunnels under Disneyland. So, taking my cue from the Dan Rather school of undercover journalism, I disguised myself in a Dumbo theme park costume, braved the sadistic assaults of children whose parents should know better (and no, that WASN'T my *trunk* you effing little brat!) and descended into the bowels of the park. Armed with a blowtorch, I located Walt—frozen in a cryogenic container—and I defrosted him. And so it is that *The Padded Cell* was able to have its own "conversation" with Mr. Disney. Here is a transcript of this exclusive interview.

Padded Cel: Mr. Disney, why, welcome back. How do you feel?

Walt Disney: Like someone gave me a high colonic with a snow cone. Is that the best you can do?

PC: I usually start slow and finish strong. You were known as a futurist. How does the 21st century stack up to what you envisioned when you conceived Tomorrowland back in the 1950s?

WD: I have to say I'm disappointed. Let me give you some examples. I was shown the tapes of the Apollo moon mission, and I must say the visuals don't *begin* to compare with my "Rocket to the Moon". And today's freeways—not remotely as fun as "Autopias!" Also, the real estate bubble has inflated Tomorrowland's famous "House of the Future" to a listing price of \$179,999,999,999 putting it about \$10,000 out of even Donald Trump's reach. Oh, and I'm

told that Monsanto's "Better Living Through Chemistry" motto was co-opted in a most unfortunate manner by a certain generation of youth in the late 1960s. (Interviewer's note: *I didn't have the heart to tell him that not one of these classic, original Disneyland attractions survived the "modernization" of his park.*)

PC: Many see you as an inspirational pioneer of children's television, with shows like *The Mickey*

or *Technicolor*.

PC: Many producers and creators complain that too much of today's animation industry has been overrun by MBAs and investment bankers who have no passion for cartoons and the craft that goes into them. Care to comment?

WD: Well, there *is* a danger there. Finance can be so challenging that before you know it, it has consumed you and the tail is wagging the dog. But, the great thing about children is that business people consistently underestimate them. Kids can usually sense which shows and movies are inspired by passion, artistry and originality.

PC: So what do you think about *Chicken Little*?

WD: Well, its box office success is timely—in respect to the uncertain outcome of our negotiations to renew our Pixar deal. But mostly I was just relieved to learn it wasn't simply another one of Michael Eisner's endearing nicknames for Jeffrey Katzenberg. Seriously, I didn't get all those darn references to those

movies that were made after I froze myself. OK, Now I have a question for you.

PC: Please go ahead...

WD: How will I know when your "strong finish" has arrived?

PC: Probably your best indication would be when you see me reach for the snow cone, funnel and compressed air pump. ■

Robby London has been working in the animation business for over a quarter century now. We suspect some of his parts may be frozen already.



Illustration by Mercedes Milligan

Mouse Club, The Wonderful World of Disney, etc. What's your take on the children's television today?

WD: I understand there is a fabulous new creative production technique that has been pioneered and championed by my company. Since I have always prided myself on technical innovation which creates magical experiences for audiences, well, that's great news! It's called... I believe...um... "Vertically Integrated Synergy." Of course, I haven't seen it yet, but I'm tickled pink at the prospect of viewing some animation produced in full "Vertically Integrated Synergy." I'm assuming it will be something like Cinemascope

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It's All Greek to Them!

Class of the Titans, Studio B's hip new action show centers on seven teen descendants of classic mythological heroes.

by Ramin Zahed

How do you re-introduce today's kids to the far-and-away world of Greek mythology without having their eyes glaze over as soon as you mention Mount Olympus? The creative minds at Vancouver-based animation house Studio B think they have the answer. Studio B co-founders and exec producers Chris Bartleman and Blair Peters decided to go for a next-next-next-generation approach by centering a show on the teen descendants of seven heroes of the ancient world. Billed as the studio's first action adventure series, the 26x22 minute series, *Class of the Titans*, follows the trials of seven unsuspecting teens who are summoned to fight the forces of evil without realizing that their ancestors were legends such as Jason, Achilles, Theseus, Atlanta, Odysseus, Hercules and that self-involved guy known as Narcissus.

The whole enterprise started less than two years ago, when Bartleman realized that there was a big demand for action-centric toon. "We had a call from someone who was looking for a show like that, and although we'd done service work on shows such as *The Mighty Ducks* and *Action Man*, most of our in-house titles were comedies," says Bartleman, who co-founded Studio

B with Peters in 1988. "So along with our development executive Michael Lahay, we cooked up the premise of the show, which was something I'd been noodling with for a while. I'd always been fascinated with Greek mythologies. But we didn't want to just retell those stories: We wanted to make them cool and new and relatable for the kids watching TV today."

To make the seven teens more appealing to young viewers, Bartleman and crew decided to strip them from any godlike powers. "We wanted kids to feel like, hey,

anybody could be a descendent of a Greek hero," Bartleman adds. "There's a smart one, a not-so-bright one, an athletic character, a sexy one, there's even a love interest that will never come into fruition, with the old Archie-and-Betty dynamic. Sure, these are ordinary kids in extraordinary situations, and they'll have to fight the villains of the week. But our feeling was, this may not be so far-fetched. It's not a show set in Mars. It's a throwback to some of the shows I watched when I was a kid. I wanted to be like Jonny Quest."

After they hammered down the con-



Blair Peters



Chris Bartleman



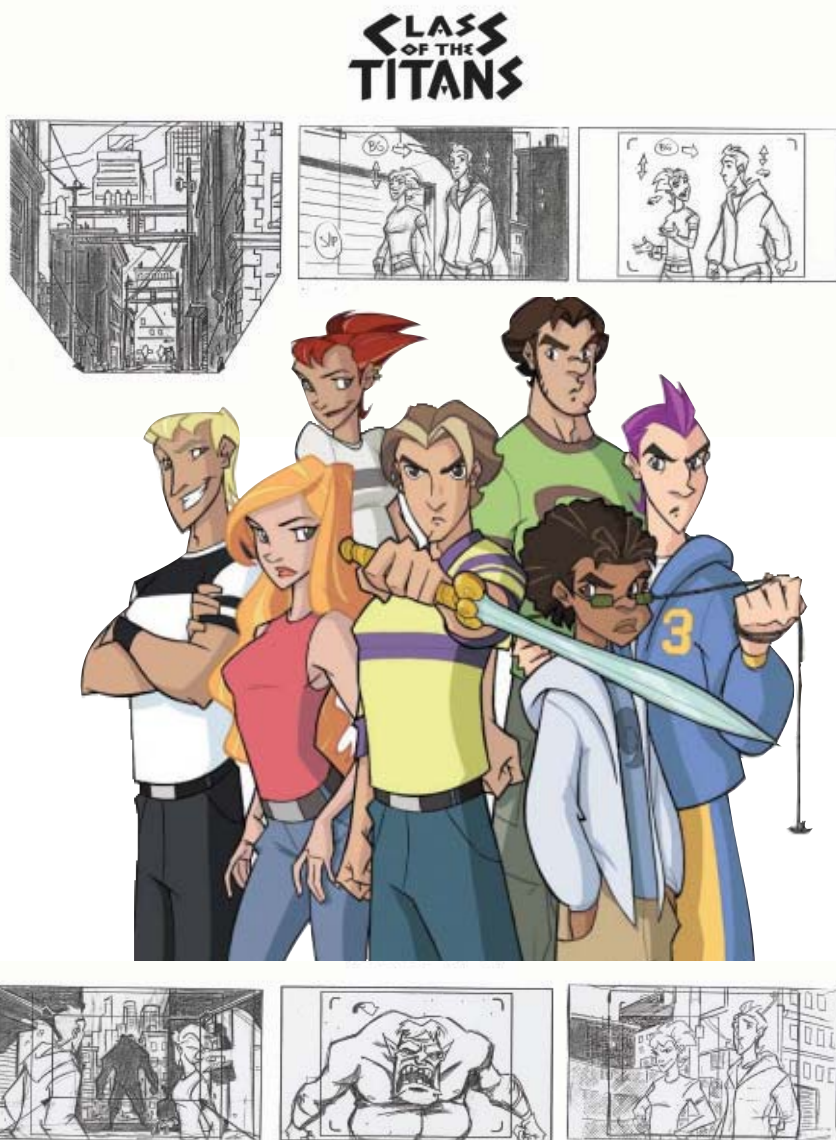
cept, the team went looking for the right design elements. Bartleman was looking for a style that married some of the more inspired elements of anime with contempo American toons. As is customary at Studio B, they allowed the young staff to give it their best shot. "One of our staffers, Kenny Park, can draw like there's no tomorrow," says Bartleman. "I always tell him, 'Man, if you'd graduated with me, I'd want to slit my wrist! So he came up with this terrific design, which is a nice hybrid of North American animation and Japanese anime. The characters are very stylized while the backgrounds are traditional."

Although the show relies on 2D animation (thanks to Toon Boom's popular USAAnimation software), the producers also use CG sparingly to depict vehicles or certain monsters. "We use Maya in-house, but we don't want the CG to stand out. We used it, for example, in an episode that involved all these giant ants running around. What's important for us is to break away from a typical Studio B look, just like we did for *Being Ian*, when we had Marv Newland come in to design the characters."

Another feature that may help the show stand out is its high number of drawings per episode. "It's a very complicated show to produce. It's fast-paced and there's a lot of quick cutting," notes Bartleman. "There are over 400 scenes in the series. We have over 35,000 drawings per show, as opposed to 20,000 which is the usual number per show."

The *Class of the Titans* was developed in conjunction with Canadian animation broadcaster Teletoon and co-produced by Wayne Dearing and his Top Draw Animation team in the Philippines. Vancouver's prolific Mercury Filmworks handles the painting aspects of the show.

This new series follows on the heels of Studio B's *Being Ian*, which premiered a year ago on YTV and is now in production for its second season on the air. The studio has a special partnership with Nelvana, which distributes both *Being Ian* and *Class of the Titans* internationally. *Class* has already received an order for a second season of 26 episodes. In addition, the studio has partnered with Classic Media to produce the new *George of the Jungle* series, slated for a 2007 airdate. Cartoon Network



and Nick U.K. are also involved in the new incarnation of the beloved property.

By any standard, Studio B, which has 160 in-house employees, is going through a very busy period, and Bartleman is quite sanguine about the animation scene in Canada. "The climate is great and the buyers are buying," he offers. "The pesky slump punctuated by 9/11 is drifting away. We are getting very good at developing shows that look great and rely on strong storytelling. Tools such as Macromedia Flash and Toon Boom's Harmony have been a huge boon to our business. We got great mileage from Flash for *Being Ian*. We do most of our character designs and storyboards straight on [Wacom's] Cintiq tablets. FTP connections between studios

have also improved the way we can communicate with overseas partners."

And when it comes to the long-term future, Bartleman says he hopes to continue developing and producing more shows that look great and are based on excellent ideas. "Blair and I like to focus our energies on polishing a great nugget of an idea. Once you have a clean, clear idea, paired with a strong, clean design, then you're home free. We're a studio run by animators. The way I look at it, if we're not having fun, then we'd better get the hell out of here!" And that's certainly a sentiment even a Greek hero can get behind. ■

Studio B's *Class of the Titans* premieres on Canada's Teletoon on December 31 at 8 p.m.

TELEVISION



Harry's Fantastic Fourth

Harry Potter's latest adventure proved to be a multi-headed monster for director Mike Newell and visual effects director Jim Mitchell. **by Ramin Zahed**

If you felt sorry for J.K. Rowling's hero in his fourth grueling outing, just think how director Mike Newell and vfx supervisor Jim Mitchell felt when they were hired to bring the 734-page tome to cinematic life.

"Difficult Times Lie Ahead, Harry!" is the movie's foreboding tagline, and it's easy to see why. Not only does Harry (played by the rapidly growing Daniel Radcliffe) have to face the pangs of adolescence—yes, he has to learn how to dance and ask a girl out on a date—he is unexpectedly chosen to compete in the grueling Triwizard Tournament, a task usually saved for older and more accomplished wizards. He also has to fight a fierce dragon and go mano a mano with the personification of evil (You-Know-Who, a.k.a. Voldemort) played by serious actor Ralph Fiennes who seems to be enjoying this welcome change of pace!

Given the elaborate nature of the film's magical sequences, it's not hard to imagine why the producers had to rely on the collaboration between nine different vendors to reach the final results: ILM, The Orphanage, Rising Sun Pictures, Animal Logic, BUF Compagnie, Double Negative, Framstore CFC, Cine-site and The Moving Picture Company joined forces to create the film's 1,200-plus vfx shots.

For Mike Newell, whose previous efforts include gentle human comedy-dramas such as *Enchanted April*, *Four Weddings and a Funeral* and *Mona Lisa Smile*, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* meant jumping into a whole new genre. "We had small visu-

al-effects components in some of my other movies, but to dive into a huge project like this was entirely new for me," says Newell during a phone call from his office in London. "Jimmy [Mitchell] was a tower of strength to me. I grew to very much rely on his opinions and skills. The thing about directing a movie like this is that with technology these days, you can do anything, so now it's all about how you do it."

Keeping It Real

Newell says the key to dramatizing this particular chapter in Harry's life was keeping the magic firmly anchored in reality. "Our approach was to make the fantasy as realistic as we possibly could," he explains. "The movie-going audience and technology are moving a head at such an amazing pace, that every year people are demanding greater sensations. But for us, all we had to do was follow in the direction of the book. The storyline gave us great excuses for dazzling visual effects, a dreadful flying, fire-breathing dragon, sea creatures, a spectacular maze that can do some nasty business, and of course, the creature of ultimate evil, Voldemort. He had to appear immensely frightening. This couldn't be just a fantasy. We wanted everything to feel very immediate and real."

According to vfx supervisor Jim Mitchell, Harry's sequences in the Triwizard Tournament required a lot of special attention to detail. "Harry has to accomplish three huge tasks and each one of them

demanded elaborate effects," says Mitchell, whose previous efforts include *Mighty Joe Young*, *Mars Attacks!*, *Sleepy Hollow* and *The Day After Tomorrow*. He also led the vfx efforts for the second Potter outing, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*. "There's an encounter with a dragon that's quite elaborate. We had this chance to create a fire-breathing obstacle. Of course, we knew going in that we had to create this amazing dragon because that's how Rowling describes it in the book," he recalls. "There have been a number of standout dragons in recent films, so our goal was to make this one different from the others. It had to be ferocious and it also had to have a raptor-like quality to it and it had to fly like a bird. We had the dilemma familiar in dinosaur films and that was to make an encounter between our hero and the dragon believable. How do we make it work if our character can run faster than this lumbering behemoth creature?"

Especially taunting was a chase sequence through Hogwarts Academy. The 20-foot-scale model of Harry's school wasn't detailed enough to allow for cameras moving through the building passages and hallways and to keep track of Harry and the dragon in pursuit. So ILM's Tim Alexander and company recreated the majestic building as a CG environment to make room for this elaborate chase. "It gave us total freedom to move our characters anywhere we wanted," says Mitchell. ILM also served up some spectacular CG crowd replication work for the World Cup of Quidditch, using its proprietary



Monsters of the Deep: Director Mike Newell and vfx director Jim Mitchell had to bring together nine different visual effects teams to create some of the illusions for the fourth Harry Potter outing, some of which included threatening sea creatures, an agile flying dragon, as well as the the terrible and terrifying Voldemort (not pictured, so you have to see the movie to catch a glimpse of the evil being).

software to multiply original sets and spectator numbers.

Potter's Life Aquatic

Another demanding chapter was Harry's encounter with various underwater creatures—Merpeople and the nasty lake monsters known as Grindylows—during the second tournament task. "We built the biggest water tank in Europe," says Newell, "It's a strange, otherworldly environment that had to be created, and then there was the task of manipulating the live actors who were interacting in that world. I have never seen anything like that before."

The 60x60x20 foot tank was constructed by London's Framestore shop under the supervision of Tim Webber. While shooting the underwater scenes, anywhere from 12 to 15 divers were on the set, some of whom were in charge of filming the sequences and others who were concerned with Radcliffe's underwater safety. The pressure difference between the top and the bottom of the tank made it impossible for the actor to swim back up to the surface to breathe between takes. "Daniel was able to go about 11 seconds without air, and these guys had to be there with air tanks and air masks to provide him with the oxygen he needed as soon as he finished the shot," explains Newell. Then it was back to the vfx team, who relied on the classic combination of Maya and Shake to build the CG portions of the young hero's aquatic feats.

Because the film's budget was reportedly in the \$130 million range, keen-eyed fans may notice certain deviations from Rowling's original book. A few subplots have been purged (including one centering on Hermione's plans to liberate the house-elves) and others have been simplified or changed, but you can expect some jaw-dropping visuals at every turn. "There are great vfx scenes sprinkled throughout the movie," says Mitchell. "Look for the spider in Mad-Eye Moody's classroom or the appearance of

Sirius Black's head in the fire embers in Gryffindor's Common Room."

One other amazing trick pulled off by the visual boffins at Framestore was recreating the Scottish highlands via blue screen and compositing work. As Mitchell explains, "You'll notice through the entire film that Hogwarts is set against the lakes and mountains of Scotland. Well, we weren't able to take the cast and crew to Scotland, so we shot the kids sitting on the side of a lake locally. Then we added shots of the Scottish mountains afterwards, using compositing tricks with blue screen and roto work."

In the end, both Newell and Mitchell hope that Harry Potter fans will be delighted by the way they've interpreted the fourth book. "Obviously, the tone of the film is controlled by the book," concludes Newell. "Some terrifying things happen. There's a death involved, and Voldemort is quite a horrific figure. The emotional tests that Harry and the kids have to go through are more severe this time around. But you also have some very funny stuff as the kids go through puberty. Ron is now aware of girls and has no idea how to deal with these feelings, and the same is true for Hermione and Harry. It helps to have this light comedic foil to



balance the other punishing goings on."

As Mitchell puts it, "You can't have a movie with wizards and magical creatures without visual effects. Thanks to the imaginative nature of the books, we get a chance to stretch our muscles and see how we can incorporate new ideas and performances within the parameters of the book." ■

Warner Bros.' *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* opened in theaters nationwide on November 18.

VISUAL EFFECTS



Fighting Fire with Fire:
After passing on the idea of creating the fire with a fluid simulation, the Digital Domain team relied on the Storm voxel renderer, Side Effects' Houdini and a very effective virtual box.

State of the Art

Fire in the Sky

How Digital Domain's creative team built that impressive ring of fire for last summer's unmanned jet movie, *Stealth*. by Barbara Robertson

This month's question is from Michael Shelton, vfx supervisor at Captive Audience: Digital Domain's work on *Stealth*, in my opinion, showcases the most seamless integration of visual effects work in a film to date. My question is about the "ring of fire" in the sky: How much of it was the dynamics system compared to practical fire and was the effect initially planned as a practical effect?

The high-flying film, *Stealth*, rockets audiences through a cloudy story about what might happen if an unmanned airplane, in this case, a jet named EDI, gets too smart for his ailerons.

In the film, to stop EDI's hijinks his handlers decide to prevent the drone from refueling. Here's the scene: To stay in one area of the sky, the fuel plane flies in a big circle. EDI tries to refuel. He gets the brush-off. He gets mad and taps into the fuel line itself. When he leaves, the hose dangling from the circling plane is spewing fuel. So, when our hero flies into the circle to refuel, his plane's backburners ignite the cloud and voila! A ring of fire.

It wouldn't really happen that way, but no matter. What mattered is what director

Rob Cohen wanted. "It's hard to describe how you want fire to look," says Markus Kurtz, who was the CG supervisor for the shot at Digital Domain. "He came up with the analogy of snapping dogs. It took us a while to figure it out."

The crew spent most of that time learning what not to do; Kurtz was on the project for two years. He first talked to experts in practical pyro. "We thought maybe we could set up a fireball and have a camera rig shoot around it to get fire arcing," says Kurtz. The idea died in planning when they couldn't figure out how to film it. So, they decided to use a digital solution.

At first, the crew tried creating the fire with a fluid simulation. They set up a virtual box with heat sources and added fuel sources, which were point clouds that they placed in a ring. "Imagine in the real world that you splashed gasoline on the ground in a circle, then lit one end and watched it burn," says Kurtz.

To tell the simulation software what kind of fuel was in the box, the team set parameters that defined the fuel sources. Then, they started the heater. When one part of the point cloud—the field—reached

a certain temperature, it ignited and the fire propagated through the field. It took two days to run the simulation and once it was finished, the crew fed the data to the renderer.

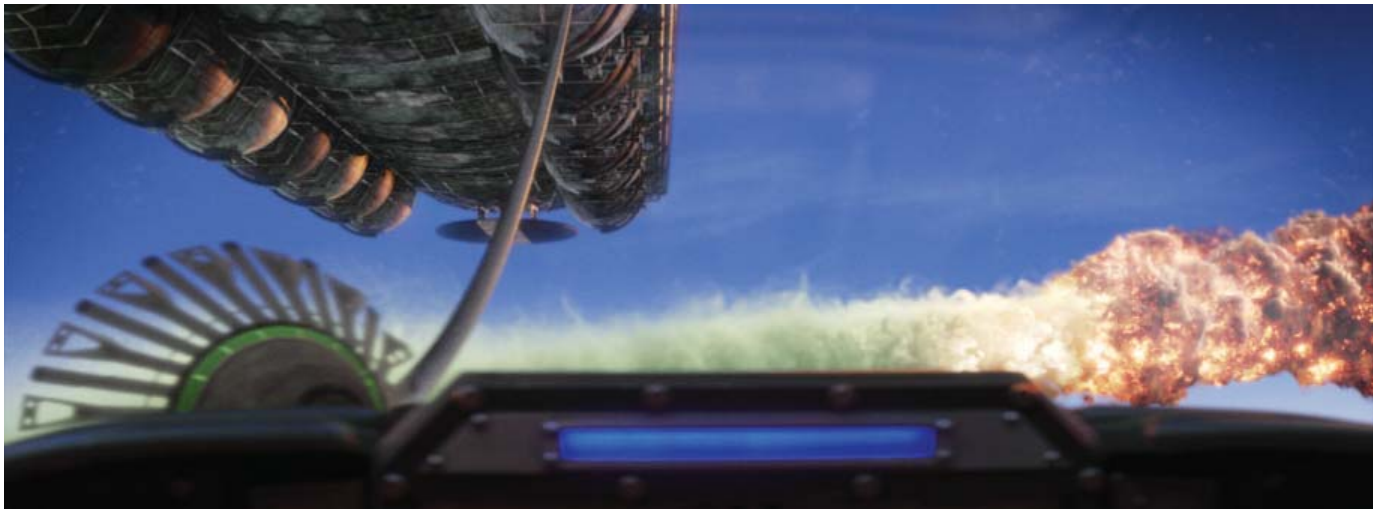
"It sounds very complicated and it is," says Kurtz. "Especially when you try to combine it with art direction. The simulation gave us interesting results, but there's always someone down the line who wants to change it."

One problem: Cohen wanted the ring to stay intact, but the physics-based simulation wanted to act like real fire.

"When you light something on fire, heat rises, it generates smoke and it doesn't maintain a shape," says Kurtz. "We had a beautiful simulation, but it didn't end up looking like a ring after a while. The other issue was that jet fuel doesn't create black smoke when it burns; you get whitish smoke if any at all. Plus, the turnaround time waiting for the simulation to render was tricky to handle in production. So, we bit the bullet and set it up procedurally."

They decided to use Digital Domain's voxel renderer called Storm (formerly known as Voxel B), which was designed for clouds and water simulation, and feed it the results from procedural particle simulations generated via Side Effects Software's Houdini.

To create the ring, they once again used the big virtual box. In the box, they put a particle cloud that represented the fuel cloud. Because the fuel plane had circled, the fuel cloud was round, with denser particles along the edge where the hose had emitted the fuel than in the center where



the particles strayed.

Then, they set the rim of the fuel cloud on fire. They started with one explosion. When those particles from that explosion flew out and hit dense pockets of fuel cloud particles, they caused other explosions. Particles from those explosions flew out and caused more dense pockets to explode. And on and on around the fuel cloud.

"That way, we could cause a true chain reaction of explosions derived from the density of the fuel cloud," says Kurtz. "We could trigger a fire that propagated through the dense areas of the fuel cloud, which gave the feeling of fire chewing through the volume of fuel. Particles that fell into thin areas of the fuel cloud did nothing."

The next trick was to turn the particles into fire and then into smoke. For this, they used two different types of particles. The fire particles started out big and shrank as they got older; the bigger the particle, the brighter the flame. The smoke particles started out small and grew as they got older.

When the crew combined the two into one simulation, the

big flame particles overtook the tiny smoke particles at the beginning and then as the simulation continued to run, the smoke particles overtook the flames.

"The render engine collected all this information and, starting on one side of the box, marched rays through the field," Markus says. "It checked every unit, accumulating densities as it went, and output two images. One was flame; one was smoke. It also rendered out depth information so the camera knew what was occluded."

That was pretty much it. They created the fuel cloud and got it approved. Then they built the fire and rendered the fuel cloud again adding in light from the fire. Finally, the team composited all the elements with Digital Domain's Nuke software, adding photographed fire elements for realistic details.

"I think the hardest thing was the trial and error of figuring out how not to do

this," says Kurtz. "Also, we started working on it before sequences were locked down. We try to do development early, but the true answers about what the client wants come when it's time to get it done in the shot."

Next month, we'll tackle Kurtz's question: "A company in Germany called Scanline is creating really good digital water. I heard a rumor that they did everything in the *Shark* movie in CG, including the water and the fish breaching. The still frames on their website are amazing. I'd be interested to know how they are doing that. What software? What renderer? How long does it take? And does it look as good in motion as in the stills?" ■

Barbara Robertson is an entertainment journalist who specializes in computer graphics, animation and visual effects. If you have a State of the Art question, e-mail her at brobertson@animationmagazine.net.



DIGITAL MAGIC



Year-end thoughts on under-performing toons and Dick Van Dyke's latest CG project

by Chris Grove

As award season now seems to be year-round, I have one of my own to give before the big guns fire off their lists around Christmas. For neatest and most disingenuous trick of the year, the winner is ... Chuck Viane (president, Buena Vista Pictures Distributions) and the marketing gurus of the Walt Disney company. Taking a page from political strategists before a big debate, Disney tactically low-balled its estimate of how *Chicken Little* would do in its opening weekend, knowing (I'm guessing), full well that it was going to beat that mark by a good margin. By "predicting" what amounts to an \$8200 per screen average (as compared to the \$17,900 per screen average of *The Incredibles* opening weekend in 2004), Disney was sending a contradictory message: We think this film is going to be a mediocre performer! If you predict \$50 million and get \$40 million, we all know that the headlines would be saying about Disney sans Pixar.

At this point in the year, we've all heard enough about how badly Hollywood has done at the box office in 2005 (if nearly \$9 billion really can be characterized as a bad year). And we've all heard studio executives do their mea culpas about poor product being part of the problem. But when it comes to animated fare, why have some of the year's biggest features underperformed?

There's a case to be made that audiences have finally had their fill. Wise-cracking animated characters with their loud and obnoxious friends may have been the food of life for Disney, Universal, Warner Bros. and Fox et. al. since 1989 (the year that *The Little Mermaid* re-wrote the rules about feature-length cartoons) but, there's a surfeit of them now and (to continue murdering a Shakespeare reference) the appetite has sickened and may be dying. Call me crazy (and write passive-aggressive letters about my lack of writing and reporting skills), but the animated feature film business may be suffering from genre burnout.

The characters in most of the stories (with the exception of Tim Burton's and Nick Park's

films) have become interchangeable and rote. As Wallace might say in his unique Lancastrian accent: "It's a much of a much-ness." The studio types I have interviewed in the past for the mainstream trades always claim that animated

played out.

This is the holiday issue, right? Okay just to prove that I don't think Christmas is a humbug, this item caught my attention from the piles of un-opened press releases on my office floor.

Utah-based 3D software developer DAZ Productions Inc. has announced the publication of a Christmas picture book for your kids (or nephews and nieces), *Mr. Finnegan's Giving Chest*. Why is this worthy of note? Because they've found a pretty clever way to feature and promote their technology and in something of value, i.e. a cool book. The tome's fetching art work was created with DAZ|Studio, the company's free 3D figure-posing and animation software package and existing DAZ models and accessories from its online store. Authored by company president, Dan Farr, and featuring the computer-generated visage of Dick Van

Dyke in the title role, the book is an inspirational Christmas story about the joy of giving. Van Dyke "plays" Mr. Finnegan, a kind-hearted toymaker who helps a young girl understand the true meaning of the holiday. Not to the surprise of people who spotted him at SIGGRAPH last year, the actor claims to be a CG hobbyist. "I'm a fan of DAZ and was amazed at the illustrations they created," he says.

Initial scenes were laid out in DAZ|Studio. Early composites were improved in DAZ|Studio's real-time environment, where lighting, cameras, poses and other elements were refined. With assistance from NVIDIA, producers used OpenGL to interact with the large scenes in real time and produce many of the test renders in a matter of seconds, saving a substantial amount of production time. Final renders were produced using 3Delight, DAZ|Studio's software renderer option.

DAZ|Studio is a free, 3D animation software package available online. Now that makes a great present. Happy Holidays! ■

Chris Grove is an in-demand Los Angeles-based actor and journalist. You can send pitches and fan mail to edit@animationmagazine.net.



A New Dick Van Dyke Show: Utah-based DAZ Productions has produced a new holiday picture book titled *Mr. Finnegan's Giving Chest*. The artists used DAZ|Studio software to deliver a CG-illustrated version of veteran actor Dick Van Dyke for the project.

films are all about a great story and not the technology. And then they proceed to produce a film whose story is as stale as a bagel left out of the bag overnight on the kitchen counter. Will they stop producing them? Not in the foreseeable future. Just as it took Hollywood about 20 years and over a dozen films to figure out that Madonna can't act and has no box office appeal, they're not going to give up on a genre no matter how

Tech Reviews

by Chris Tome

3DConnexion's SpacePilot



Those who have been working in the 3D industry for more than a few years are probably familiar with the SpaceBall six-degrees-of-freedom motion controller by 3D Connexion, a division of Logitech. Although the hardware was

fine, and the intent of the device was noble, there simply wasn't very much driver support for the device in the DCC space, and the great majority of these units were sold to CAD markets. Enter the SpacePilot which has totally improved the scene with a good number of drivers for major 3D apps, Photoshop and more.

The SpacePilot itself is dramatically redesigned from its predecessors. It now includes an LCD readout which displays a number of different functions assigned to the hotkeys on the device and changes automatically depending on the programs being used. The "puck" style six-degree-of-freedom controller is also more elegant and responsive and can perform many tasks in different apps. In Photoshop, for example, you can set it to zoom in and out when you twist it and change brush sizes when you push down or pull up on the controls. If you use Photoshop frequently, this feature alone could make it worth the cost. I use it with a Wacom tablet and find it to be extremely useful.

The major 3D applications such as 3ds Max, Maya, Softimage and Cinema4D are all supported as well, with LightWave on the way. The drivers for each offer varying levels of functionality, with Maya users being the most likely to benefit from the integration the SpacePilot offers. This is not to say the other programs don't benefit greatly from this device, just that with MELScript, the SpacePilot has really been able

to offer a wider range of functions. Modelers and animators will find that using the SpacePilot leads to an increase in efficiency in many ways. The hotkeys and special function keys (21-plus programmable and 15 reprogrammable speed keys) are all mappable through software, so an almost infinite number of variations can be made by each person to enhance the workflow. The SpacePilot has a sculpted palmrest and also offers adjustable sensitivity.

The few issues I have with this device revolve solely around driver support for certain apps and operating systems (primarily just OS X); and they aren't deal killers, but they need to be addressed. 3D Connexion is working on them, though, and with driver support for Corel Painter and Final Cut Pro, for example, the SpacePilot would be an utterly indispensable device for any digital content creator. As it sits now, if you use a 3D app and/or Photoshop on a continuous basis, the device seems to be worth every penny. The only problem is that after using it for a couple of days, you might feel completely lost without it! Yup, it's that handy.

Web site: www.3dconnexion.com/products

Price: \$499, €549 (trial offer)

CorelDRAW Graphic Suite 12

Almost every artist or animator I know has a need for a vector-based drawing program at some point in their workflow. Although this isn't always the case, millions of artists use apps like Illustrator, Freehand or CorelDRAW to perform these functions. Many Flash animators for example, find it more effective to create their art in such programs, then import the vector data into their 2D animation software, as typical 2D animation-based apps tend to have less capable vector-drawing tools.

I've always been a big fan of CorelDRAW and I believe that the drawing and vector manipulation tools have long been superior to

other illustration apps. This is of course only my opinion, but I have used the program to create everything from corporate identities, to vinyl graphics for racecars, vectors for use in 3D work and much more. I simply feel the drawing tools in CorelDRAW are more intuitive and easier to use than those of Illustrator or Freehand for instance.

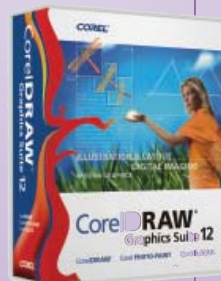
With CorelDRAW 12, the company has added a slew of new and useful features and turned what was already a great piece of software into an incredible artist's tool. One really cool new tool is intelligent shape recognition, which allows you to draw freeform shapes (circles, triangles, squares, parallelograms, etc.) and converts them to actual hard-lined shapes with ease. The uses of this tool are so numerous we don't have space to cover them all, but I'll tell you this: It's freaking fun to use. Also, the new sketch layout tools work in the same manner for design pages for print, the Web or PDFs, and it shows Corel's continued excellence in creating vectored shapes with a minimum amount of nodes.

Support for editing bitmap images directly in CorelDRAW has also been improved, and there are new tools such as the healing brush, which works much like the one found in Photoshop. Dynamic guides allow for easier placement of design elements, enhanced import tools and new alignment options really aid in correcting designs and logos.

Although some may look at Corel as the red-headed stepchild of drawing programs, I feel very strongly that this is an absolutely unfair assertion. I have found over many years of using the program that it's far easier to use and effective overall than either Illustrator or Freehand. If you work with vector graphics for any reason at all, you'd really be doing yourself a favor by checking out CorelDRAW 12. It's not only a good deal price wise, I believe it gives the big boys a run for their money and, in many aspects, it's superior to other vector-drawing tools.

Website: www.corel.com

Price: \$399 (box), \$179 (upgrade), \$179 (download) More discounts available online.





UCLA profs Mark Sawicki and Glenn Campbell.

Visual Effects at UCLA

The Pros on the Podium. **by Ellen Wolff**

When the 2006 spring semester at UCLA begins, two Hollywood visual effects veterans will be at the head of the class. As they have for over a decade, Mark Sawicki and Glenn Campbell will team teach a class for UCLA Extension Entertainment Studies called "Special Visual Effects Cinematography," providing a primer on the techniques used in this ever-evolving field.

Sawicki took a break from filming effects for Brian De Palma's upcoming *The Black Dahlia* to offer a glimpse of the popular class. "What Glenn and I bring are actual experiences and material from behind the scenes. We talk about the pitfalls and realities behind shots that we have done. For example, Glenn worked on *Dick Tracy*, and he explains why elements were shot in certain ways. We are the last Jedi Knights of traditional effects work," he says with a laugh.

Sawicki, who now does both optical and digital work for Custom Film Effects in Burbank, Calif., is an alumnus of the legendary matte painting studio Illusion Arts, and his credits include *X-Men*, *Gangs of New York* and *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*. Campbell, who's an effects supervisor at Burbank-based Area 51, is known for his work on *The X-Files*, and he won a Visual Effects Emmy for the mini-series *Children of Dune*.

The two teachers are especially interested in communicating traditional principles and how those principles apply when artists manipulate today's digital tools. A favorite example used in the class is the stop-motion effects work pioneered by Ray Harryhausen in the 1950s, notes Sawicki. "If you teach what Ray did—putting foam rubber puppets in front of

rear projection screens—and bring that into the 21st century, we're doing exactly the same thing with Maya software. Instead of a rear projection screen, you're mapping the background on polygons. You have poly-



gonal figures instead of rubber ones. But the illusionary tricks are the same."

While the UCLA class revolves primarily around lectures and screenings, the course is peppered with hands-on demonstrations. Sawicki explains, "I'll come out with a C stand and a little model rocket and do a forced perspective shot with a DV camera. The students are so enamored of that because they see that they can do this. They don't have to buy software that has a big learning curve, which can be a daunting prospect."

Sawicki has captured some of his show-and-tell teaching style on DVD as well, in a series called *Clay Animation Studio* that is marketed to schools worldwide (via www.art-tek.com). The demos reflect his belief that by understanding the fundamental ideas of stop motion, people can move logically to CG animation if they choose. "The simple math that a clay animator uses to plot moves goes a long way toward

making sense out of all the graphs and curve tools used in today's animation software."

The international student body that's attracted to the UCLA class, "includes people in transition who are having trouble finding film work and think that digital might be the answer for them," observes Sawicki. "There are also people who want to be independent filmmakers and want to know how effects are done so they can incorporate effects into their films. And we get a lot of digital artists who want to understand the element-making aspect of visual effects so that they can do their jobs more efficiently."

But Sawicki admits that some of his students have an idealized view of the visual-effects industry. "I've had people tell me that they want to be model-makers, and it's hard to tell them that's a super-rare job today. When you fall in love with the movie business at age 12, by the time you're old enough to take up the reins of the industry, it has changed so much. The movie business you wanted to get into is not the movie business of today. There was a disservice done a few years ago when digital was hot, where young people were told they could make \$100 an hour. Those people are taking real estate classes now!"

By the time Sawicki and Campbell's students complete the "Special Visual Effects Cinematography" course, they'll have a pretty clear idea of what the nuts-and-bolts work entails. "Glenn insists that they answer essay questions at the end of the class. We give them a storyboard page from an actual film and ask them to explain how they would do it. And we don't want the answer 'I would do it digitally!' We want to see the thought process of how they would break it down and juxtapose different elements."

After a career that spans 25 years as an animator and visual-effects cameraman, Sawicki considers teaching a rewarding complement to his day job. Teaching, asserts Sawicki, "is refreshing. To share what you're doing puts everything in perspective." ■

Ellen Wolff is a Los Angeles-based journalist who specializes in visual effects and education.



Caveman animated in *Clay Animation Studio* DVD



Actual animation figure used in a *Judas Priest* video, now used as a prop in the class



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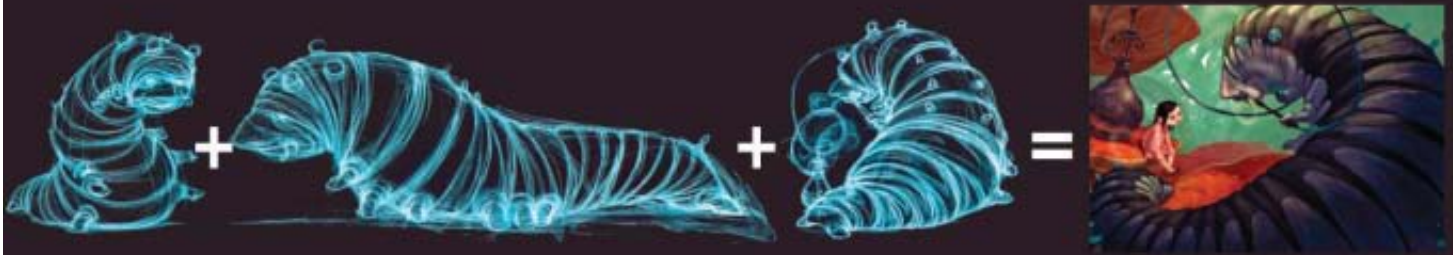
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an-i-mate \`a-nə-māt\ *verb* [from Latin *animatus*] - to give life to



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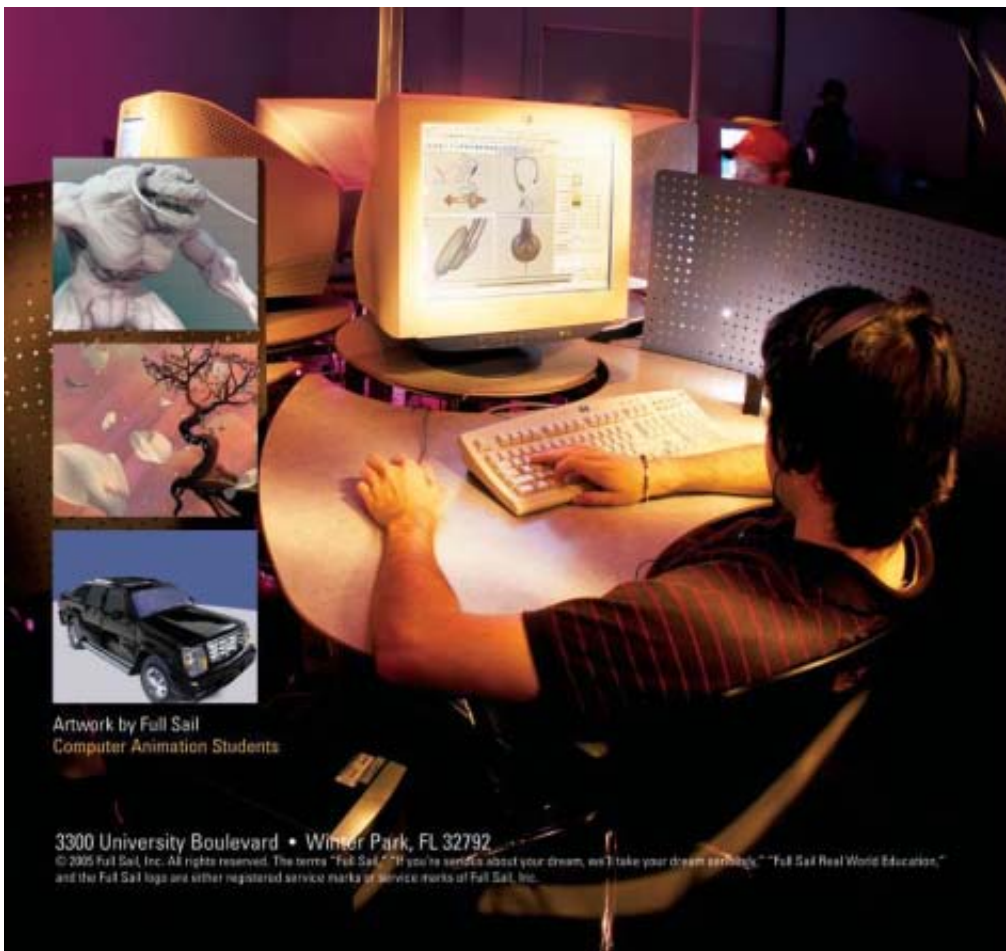
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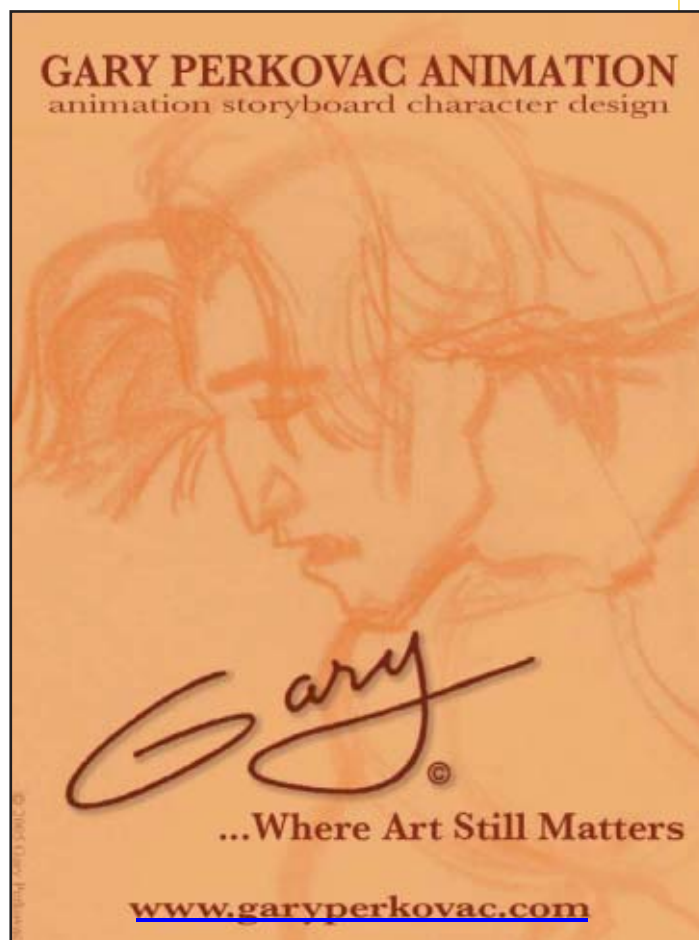
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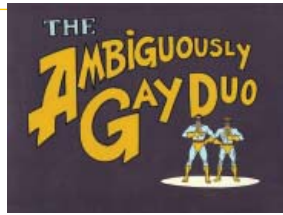
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A Day in the Life



9:30 The day begins at the "State of the Art" animation studio, J.J. Sedelmaier Productions, Inc., in White Plains, NY - please note: obvious expansion of the home office is scheduled for completion in 2007.



White Plains, N.Y.-based toon and design shop **J. J. Sedelmaier** is celebrating its 15th anniversary this year. It's a special landmark for the good sports who animated the first season of *Beavis and Butt-Head*, the *Speed Racer* ads for Volkswagen and those brilliant *Saturday TV Funhouse* and *Ambiguously Gay Duo* spots for *Saturday Night Live*. A major ad campaign for *The Chicago Tribune* is keeping them very busy these days. We asked them to give us a slice of their lives at the studio and they obliged.

Happy 15th, you brilliant people!



9:31 Time to start the coffee.

9:32 Heather Krumm greets us at the front desk as she enters the daily quota of reference volumes into the studio's extensive library.



9:33 Coffee's brewing.



10:27 Dave Lovelace explains a scene to John Bonarrigo.



10:43 "The Boss", Patrice Sedelmaier handles a problem. please note: Patrice utilizes the JJSP cellular network.



11:12 Heather punches some paper



11:29 Claire Widman works on a layout.



11:34 Waiting for another pot to brew.



12:52 Dave Lovelace addresses track revisions.



1:00 LUNCH ! please note: we often watch films on our new RCA Selectavision videodisc system.



1:49 A call for J.J. on extension #19.



2:17 Dan Madia works out some final calculations before going to final production.



3:24 Gene DeCiccio chooses a color.



3:34 Time for a cup of coffee !



6:00 G'nite! Another day of animation under our belt !

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